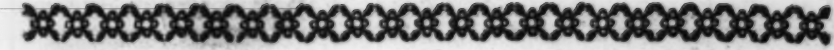
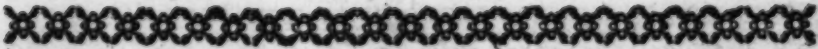


3



CONSIDERATIONS  
ON THE  
LIFE AND DEATH  
OF  
ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.



3





CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

3

LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN the BAPTIST.

---

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IN OXFORD.

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CONSIDERATIONS  
OF THE  
PREFACE

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# PREFACE.

**I**T is a fine remark of Lord *Bacon*,  
that, “As wines, which, at first  
“ pressing, run gently, yield a more  
“ pleasant taste than those, where the  
“ wine-press is hard wrought, because  
“ those somewhat relish of the stone  
“ and skin of the grape; so those ob-  
“ servations are most wholesome and  
“ sweet, which flow from Scriptures  
“ gently expressed, and naturally ex-  
“ pounded, and are not wrested or  
“ drawn aside to common places, or  
“ controversies.”

OBSERVATIONS of this kind may certainly be made, to great advantage, on *historical* portions of Scripture more especially; since, as the same incomparable author tells us elsewhere, “ Knowledge drawn freshly, and as it “ were in our view, out of particulars, “ knows the way best to particulars “ again: and it hath much greater life “ for practice, when the discourse at- “ tends upon the example, than when “ the example attends upon the dis- “ course; as *Macbiavel* handled mat- “ ters of policy and government, by “ discourses of history and example “ taken from *Livy*.” The doctrines and duties of Christianity are, in like manner, best deduced from the facts on which it is founded. The narration furnisheth both matter and method for the discourse, which is heard with pleasure, and remembered with ease.

HISTORY

HISTORY and biography are frequently employed in the service of error and vice. They may operate as effectually in the recommendation of truth and virtue. Example shews truth as it were embodied ; and while it displays the excellency of virtue, demonstrates its practicability. The contemplation of faith, as it discovereth itself in the lives of patriarchs and prophets, apostles and saints, inclineth us to believe as they did ; and the sight of frail mortals, like ourselves, who, by the divine assistance, surmounted all obstructions, and continued to walk in the paths of righteousness, naturally suggesteth, to every beholder, the question — What should hinder me from doing the same?

OPPORTUNITIES for such exercises are continually afforded by the return of those days, whereon we commemo-



rate the heroic piety of ancient worthies, distinguished in the annals of religion ; whose story presenteth us with occurrences, not, like those related in secular histories, of use only to politicians and generals, but universally interesting ; instructing us in the art of governing the little kingdom within ; of atchieving the greatest conquests, and gaining the most glorious victories ; since “ Better is he  
“ that ruleth his spirit, than he that  
“ taketh a city ;” teaching us how to live the life, and die the death of the righteous ; a twofold task, which every man hath upon his hands, and in the performance of which he cannot fail, but at the hazard of something more valuable than crowns and sceptres.

THE author of the following *Considerations* was directed, in the choice  
of



of his subject, by the circumstances of his situation, some parts of them having been delivered from the pulpit, as occasion called for them, in the chapel of *St. Mary Magdalen* College, upon the anniversary of the nativity of *St. John* the Baptist, before a learned and most respectable audience. The favourable manner, in which they were then heard, hath encouraged him to revise, enlarge, and digest them into their present form. The reader hath now before him a compleat history of the Baptist, extracted from the Evangelists, and methodized according to the order of time, in which the events appear to have happened, with such observations and reflections as the several parts of it seemed to suggest, for the confirmation of faith, and the advancement of holiness.

AN attentive perusal of the subsequent pages may, it is hoped, be of service to the younger students in theology, with a view to whom, and to those more particularly of the Society, whose welfare and prosperity the author is bound by every tie to consult and promote, as they were at first composed, so they are now published; that, beholding the glories which display themselves in the exalted character here offered to their inspection, they may be fired with a noble ambition to bear their testimony to the best of masters, and, from a well spent retirement, come forth bright examples of temperance and purity, zeal and knowledge, integrity and constancy, to preach Repentance, and proclaim Salvation.

C O N-

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CONSIDERATIONS

ON THE

LIFE AND DEATH

OF

ST. JOHN THE BAPTIST.

SECTION I.

*Considerations on the nativity of St. John,  
and the circumstances that attended it.*

**T**HE lights of the intellectual, SECT. I.  
like those of the natural system,  
are not all of equal magnitude  
and lustre. In the church, as in the  
firmament, "one star differeth from

A

"ano-

SECT. I. "another star in glory." Each contributeth it's share towards dissipating the darkness with which we are surrounded; but some, by their superior splendor, immediately attract and dazzle the eye of the beholder. Conspicuous, above others, is the character of St. *John* the Baptist, that bright precursor of the sun, and harbinger of the morning, who arose to give notice of Messiah's approach, and to prepare the world for his reception: burning, and shining, he ran his course, proclaiming to the inhabitants of the earth, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" in other words, "The night is far spent, the day is at hand; cast off therefore the works of darkness, and put on the armour of light<sup>a</sup>. Awake, thou that sleepest, and arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light<sup>b</sup>."

PRAISE is ever valuable in proportion to the judgment and integrity of him who bestoweth it; and the panegyric is truly honourable, when the panegyrist is one who will not flatter, and

<sup>a</sup> Rom. xiii. 12.

<sup>b</sup> Ephes. v. 14.

who



who cannot be deceived. How then shall we raise our thoughts to conceive adequately of a person, whose encomium was spoken by the Son of God, and concerning whom that Son of God declared, "Among them that are born of women there hath not arisen a greater than John the Baptist<sup>a</sup>." After this declaration made by the master, the disciples cannot well be hyperbolical in their praises of St. *John*, as the great pattern of repentance; the relation of Christ; the friend of the bridegroom; the herald of the king immortal; the glory of saints, and the joy of the world.

It is observable, that the Baptist's nativity is the only one (that of Christ excepted) which the church has thought proper to celebrate. The days appointed for the commemoration of other saints are generally those on which they respectively ceased from their labours, and entered into their everlasting rest; the day of a good man's death being indeed the day of his birth, and this world no more than the womb in which he is formed and matured for his admission

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 11.

SECT. I. into a better, where there is neither crying nor pain. But the nativity of St. *John* being designed, by the remarkable incidents that accompanied it, to turn the eyes of men towards one who was far greater; one, the latchet of whose shoes he confessed himself not worthy to unloose; the church keeps a day sacred to it, and directs us to begin our meditations by considering, as all *Judea* did when it happened, "what manner of child<sup>a</sup>" that should be, which was so wonderfully born.

HE whose works are all wrought in number, weight, and measure, bringeth every event to pass in it's proper season. The time approached which had been decreed in the counsels of the Most High, foretold by the Prophets, and ardently desired by holy men of old, when the Son of God should be manifested, to redeem his people from death, and to lead them in the path of life. As this redemption was not to be effected by fleshly might and power, the spiritual king of *Israel* chose to make his appearance, when the house of *Da-*

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 66.

*vid* was like a root buried in the earth; SECT. I.  
 and therefore his forerunner was born  
 “in the days of *Herod* the king<sup>a</sup> ;”  
 days, when his countrymen were under  
 a foreign jurisdiction, and the prospect  
 on all sides was gloomy. True indeed  
 it is, that the sacred lamp went not out  
 in the temple, where the good old *Si-*  
*meon* and the devout *Anna* served God  
 instantly with fastings and prayers, and  
 waited, as many others did, with ear-  
 nest expectation, for the consolation of  
*Israel*. They were not discouraged by  
 the gross darkness which then covered  
 the earth, but rather concluded from  
 thence, that the dawn of day could not  
 be far off; as the mercies of heaven  
 generally come when man most wants,  
 and, humanly speaking, has least ground  
 to hope for them; to the end that he  
 may with thankfulness receive the be-  
 nefit, and with humility give God the  
 glory. And this may be an useful lesson  
 to those who shall live in the latter days  
 of the Gentile church, which are to  
 precede the *second* advent of Christ,  
 when they will behold the religion of

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 5.

SECT. I. Christians degenerated into an empty form, and their zeal and love frozen at the fountain; when daily multiplying heresies, like the frogs in *Egypt*, shall infest and contaminate all things; when infidelity shall rage and swell, and iniquity of every kind shall abound. Sights like these may confound and stagger those who shall then be ignorant of the scriptures, and weak in faith. But an acquaintance with the divine dispensations will turn them into so many arguments for the truth of revelation, and the approach of the day of God.

“ When these things begin to come to  
 “ pass; then look up, and lift up your  
 “ heads, for your redemption draweth  
 “ nigh :” then be found, with *Simeon*  
 and *Anna*, in the temple, waiting for  
 the consolation of *Israel*.

WHEN we read of men who have done good in their generations, and shone as lights in the world, curiosity naturally leads us to enquire after their connections and relations, and especially after the happy persons chosen to be the instruments of conveying such blessings

<sup>a</sup> Luke xxi, 28.



to the church. The scripture account SECT. I.  
of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth* is concise,  
but comprehensive. He was “a priest  
“of the course of *Abia*,” she was “of  
“the daughters of *Aaron*,” and “they  
“were both righteous before God,  
“walking in all the commandments  
“and ordinances of the Lord, blame-  
“less”. The course of *Abia* was the  
eighth in order of the twenty four cour-  
ses of priests appointed to relieve each  
other in the service of the temple,  
where, during their ministration, they  
resided in the chambers allotted them  
for that purpose; that so, being seques-  
tered from the cares and pollutions of  
the world, they might “wait on the  
“Lord without distraction,” perform-  
ing the outward ceremonies of the law,  
and exercising their faith in the con-  
templation of those heavenly things  
shadowed out by them. This holy office  
*Zacharias*, in the worst of times, adorn-  
ed and beautified with a correspondent  
holiness of life. The spirit of the sanc-  
tuary rested upon him, and manifested  
itself in the fruit of righteousness; a

\* Luke i. 5, 6.

righteous-

## SECT. I.

righteousness, which exceeded that of the Scribes and Pharisees, approving itself in the sight of God, to whom are known the secrets of the heart, as well as in that of men, who are witnesses only of the external deportment. Thro' the strength of this spirit, he walked in the path of an uniform obedience, an invariable observer of those ordinances which were at that time the sacramental means and pledges of pardon and acceptance, through faith in him, of whose advent he was a devout expectant. From such a father, and a mother worthy of him, who graced the line of *Aaron* by a like inviolable sanctity of manners, was the Baptist to descend; that the *Jews* might have no possible objection against him; that he might be a proper forerunner of one who was to make all the world in love with the beauty of holiness; that it might appear wherein true nobility of birth consisteth, viz. in a descent from persons consecrated to the service of God, and of an exemplary piety; and lastly, to assure us, that on the heads of those, who to a holy profession add a holy life, will,



will, sooner or later, descend the choicest blessings which heaven hath to bestow on the sons of men. SECT. I.

BUT let not such be impatient, because those blessings are for a while deferred. He, who sends them, best knows the proper time of sending them, and often sees it necessary, for many reasons, to exercise the faith and patience of his servants, who may always rest satisfied, that in due season he will bring every thing to pass, which will conduce to their true welfare. The scripture, having witnessed of *Zacharias* and *Elizabeth*, that “they were both righteous before God, walking in all the commandments and ordinances of the Lord blameless,” proceedeth, in the very next words, to inform us, that “they had no child, because that Elizabeth was barren, and they were both will stricken in years<sup>a</sup>.” They who stand highest in the favour of God, may, therefore, during the greatest part of their lives, want the external and visible marks of it, and lie under the burden

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 7.

SECT. I. of "reproach among men,"<sup>a</sup> as was the case of childless women in *Judea*. But these two pious persons, when their condition, in this respect, seemed desperate, were upon the eve of felicity. For of parents at their time of life *John* was to be born; that so the miraculous manner of his birth might excite the attention of mankind, and dispose them to listen to his voice, when it should be heard in the wilderness; and also, that it might prepare them for that great event which was taking place, as the prophet *Isaiah* had foretold; "A virgin shall conceive, and bear a son." In circumstances parallel with those of St. *John*, were born, of old, *Isaac*, and *Joseph*, and *Samson*, and *Samuel*, all of them illustrious forerunners of Messiah, in one or other of his three characters, prophetic, sacerdotal, or regal. And did not God intend, by so often causing "the barren woman to keep house, and "and to become a joyful mother of "children," to make that power known, by which the incarnation of the Redeemer and the fruitfulness of his church

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 25.

were to be effected in the latter days, SECT. I.  
 when, according to St. Paul, the proph-  
 etical injunction of *Isaiah* was obeyed,  
 “Sing, O barren, thou that didst not  
 “bear; break forth into singing, and  
 “cry aloud, thou that didst not travel  
 “with child!”

He who is employed in discharging  
 with fidelity the duties of his calling,  
 takes the surest way to obtain the con-  
 tinuation and increase of his heavenly  
 Master's favours. A son was promised  
 to *Zacharias*, “While he executed the  
 “priest's office before God,” as the ri-  
 tual of the church enjoined, “In the  
 “order of his course, and according to  
 “the custom.” The reflection of a  
 pious writer upon this circumstance is  
 no less just than beautiful. “One priest  
 “alone,” says he, “intent on his duty,  
 “who diffuses the sweet favour of  
 “Christ, and is constant in prayer,  
 “draws down on the people more bless-  
 “ings than a great number of negligent  
 “priests. A man ought,” continues he,  
 “to discharge all the ecclesiastical func-

<sup>a</sup> *Isai.* liv. 1. *Gal.* iv. 27.

<sup>b</sup> *Luke* i. 8, 9.

SECT. I. "tions with the spirit of the sacred mi-  
 "nisty, as *before God*; and under his  
 "immediate inspection; to perform  
 "them *in order*, in his proper station,  
 "without ambitiously seeking an high-  
 "er; to do nothing merely of his own  
 "will, but to observe the well esta-  
 "blished *customs*, as being the necessary  
 "securities of peace. This is the truth  
 "which these shadows prefigured, and  
 "these the dispositions worthy a mini-  
 "ster of the true temple, which is the  
 "church."

THE annuntiation of the Baptist's  
 conception happened at the time of in-  
 cense, when his father, having put on  
 the robe of honour, and being clothed,  
 like the great Mediator whom he per-  
 sonated, with the garments of glory and  
 beauty, entered into the temple, while  
 the whole congregation of the people,  
 assembled without, sent up their united  
 prayers to be accepted at the throne of  
 grace, through the intercession which  
 was then making for them by the levi-  
 tical priest, acting in the name of him  
 who was to "arise after the order of  
 "Melchisedek, and not to be called

"after

*a. Quæmel. in Loc.*




“after the order of Aaron.” While the joint prayers of priest and people were thus offered up with the blood of sprinkling, and the sweet-smelling favour of the holy incense, an angel suddenly appeared to *Zacharias*, as he was executing his office in the temple; that being the place to which those blessed spirits, when they visit these lower regions, ever delight to resort, as bearing the nearest resemblance to the happy mansions from which they descend.

SECT. I.

BUT whether it be, that the glory of celestial spirits overpowers the faculties of human nature, or that man, conscious of having sinned against heaven, naturally trembles at the sight of a messenger from thence, we find, the appearance of an angel had the same effect upon *Zacharias*, the blessed virgin, and the shepherds: they were all “fore-  
“afraid.” Their minds must be first composed, and put into a capacity of receiving the heavenly tidings brought them by the good angels, who, like good men, manifest themselves by the gracious and encouraging manner of

\* Heb. vii. 11.

their

SECT. I.  their address, and having removed all misconceived apprehensions, proceed to instruct and comfort those to whom they are sent. "Fear not, Zacharias, for thy prayer is heard, and thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son." <sup>a</sup> Zacharias had prayed for the redemption of *Israel* by Messiah, and therefore was honoured by being made, in a wonderful manner, the father of his illustrious forerunner. The priest was anxious for the welfare of the church, and the man was blessed in his own private concerns. He sought "first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness," and the blessing of a son was "added unto him." -- "Thy wife Elizabeth shall bear thee a son, and thou shalt call his name JOHN," that is, being interpreted, the *grace*, or *gift*; "and many shall rejoice at his birth." Not only thou shalt rejoice, and Elizabeth with thee, at the birth of a son so long despaired of, and such a son too, but it shall be matter of joy, at the time, to all who look for redemption; and afterwards, thousands and millions shall re-

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 13.



joyce at the remembrance of it; the day SECT. I.  
shall be kept as a festival throughout all  
generations; with joy and gladness shall  
it be kept, thanksgiving and the voice  
of melody. Encouraged by the ex-  
ample of *Zacharias*, let the priests, the  
ministers of the Lord, be never weary  
of waiting for his loving kindness in the  
midst of his temple. Let it be the de-  
light of their lives to execute their office,  
every one in that order and station in  
which he is placed. So will God make  
them to hear of joy and gladness, and  
grant them to behold the success of their  
labours for the conversion of sinners,  
and the edification of his people. The  
church, like *Elizabeth*, shall bring forth  
fruit in her old age, and her friends shall  
rejoice greatly, when they hear that the  
Lord hath shewed mercy on her\*.

DISTRUST of Providence, and the  
accomplishment of it's designs, when  
appearances are on the other side, will  
sometimes invade the hearts of the best  
of men; and *Zacharias* himself so far  
partook of the incredulous spirit which  
at that period had possessed the syna-


\* Luke i. 58.

SECT. I. gogue; that he "sought after a sign."

--- "Whereby shall I know this? For  
 "I am an old man, and my wife well  
 "stricken in years." How different, in  
 a parallel case, was the behaviour of his  
 father *Abraham*, of which *St. Paul* has  
 left us the following exalted description.  
 --- "Who against hope believed in hope,  
 "that he might become the father of  
 "many nations, according to that which  
 "was spoken, So shall thy seed be.  
 "And being not weak in faith, he con-  
 "sidered not his own body now dead,  
 "neither yet the deadness of Sarah's  
 "womb. He staggered not at the pro-  
 "mise of God through unbelief, but  
 "was strong in faith, giving glory to  
 "God, and being fully persuaded, that  
 "what he had promised he was able also  
 "to perform". The demand of *Zacharias*,  
 however, was complied with, and  
 a sign was granted him in the punish-  
 ment of his unbelief. The use of that  
 tongue, which, instead of giving glory  
 to God, had been employed in raising  
 objections, was taken from him, and a

<sup>a</sup> Rom. iv. 18.

silence

silence of some months was imposed as SECT. I.  
a penance for the abuse of speech. 

BUT when the wonderful child was born, who, even before his birth, entered upon his prophetical office, and gave testimony to his Saviour in the womb, then declaring, by his exultation, what he afterward did by words, "Behold the Lamb of God;" and *Zacharias* had acknowledged the GIFT of God, by directing that his name should be JOHN; then the mouth of the father was opened; and, to shew us the proper employment of the tongue, when heaven grants the use of it, he "praised God." Faith restored what incredulity had taken away; "he believed, and therefore he spake." And his heart having been prepared, by silence and retirement, for the reception of celestial influences, he was now "filled with the Holy Ghost," and brake forth into that divine hymn, which shall be the subject of the next section.

## SECTION II.

*Considerations on the hymn of Zacharias.*


SECT. II.

**A**MONG the alterations in nature, which notify the return of spring, no one is more pleasing, than the exchange of a long and melancholy silence, for that melody which then re-foundeth on every side of us, in the woods and fields. *Solomon* hath not forgotten this circumstance, in his short but lovely description of that delightful season. "Lo, the winter is past, the rain is over and gone, the flowers appear on the earth, the time of the singing of birds is come, and the voice of the turtle is heard in our land<sup>a</sup>." The advent of *Messiah* was announced, in a similar manner, to the church; and we may say of it, in the words of the Roman poet, which, like those of *Caiaphas*, contained much more

<sup>a</sup> Cant. ii, 11.


than



than he was aware of who uttered SECT. II.  
them, 

*Aspice, venturo lætentur ut omnia sæclo!*

For now, the blessed virgin “magni-  
“fieth the Lord, and her spirit rejoiceth  
“in God her Saviour:” the father of  
the Baptist “blesseth the Lord God of  
“Israel, for having visited and redeemed  
“his people:” the angels themselves  
descend in full choir, to perform an an-  
them in honour of their Lord and ours:  
and old *Simeon* closeth all with his affect-  
ing farewell to the world; “Lord, now  
“lettest thou thy servant depart in peace,  
“according to thy word; for mine eyes  
“have seen thy salvation.” Thus did  
all “break forth into joy, and sing to-  
“gether, because the Lord had com-  
“forted his people, and redeemed Jeru-  
“salem;” because the sun of righteous-  
ness, by his visitation of the earth, was  
putting a period to a dreary winter, and  
introducing, in it’s stead, a new and  
more glorious spring. And as spring is  
the *morning* of the year, *Cowley’s* ad-  
dress to the material light, which is

SECT. II. but a faint copy, may be applied to the  
 great original himself;

*When thou lift'st up thy radiant head  
 Out of the morning's purple bed,  
 Thy choir of birds about thee play,  
 And all the joyful world salutes the  
 rising day.*

THE hymn which we are at present to consider, is that of *Zacharias*. The occasion on which it was indited, was the birth of St. *John*: the subject is the covenant of grace in Christ Jesus: the language is that of the Old Testament, old terms being transferred to new things: the speaker is a priest and a prophet, "Full of the Holy Ghost."

DURING a tedious interval of silence, *Zacharias* had beheld the accomplishment of the divine promise to himself; and he knew likewise, that the Saviour of mankind would soon be born of his relation, the virgin *Mary*. We may judge, therefore, what pain and grief he felt, while restrained from uttering that "good matter," of which his heart was so full, that when at length God saw fit to remove the mound, it burst forth

forth at once in an impetuous and irresistible torrent of thanksgiving; SECT. II.

I. "BLESSED be the Lord God of  
"Israel, for he hath visited and  
"redeemed his people."

IT was no new thing for "the God  
"of Israel" to "visit and redeem his  
"people." He had often done it, when  
they were in affliction and captivity.  
But *so* to visit and redeem, was not all  
that he intended to do for his chosen.  
Through things temporal he was desirous  
that they should look at things eternal,  
and carry on their views from a bodily to  
a spiritual *redemption*, in which all his  
counsels terminated; a *redemption* to be  
effected by his *visiting* mankind, dwell-  
ing among them in a tabernacle of flesh,  
and in that tabernacle offering up the  
true propitiatory sacrifice; a *redemption*,  
that should extend to Gentiles as well  
as Jews, and of both make one *people*,  
a new *Israel*, of which he should be *the*  
*Lord God*, for evermore. How gracious  
this *visitation*! How astonishing this re-

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 68, &c.

*demption!*

SECT. II. *demption!* “Blessed be the Lord God  
 “of Israel, for he hath visited and re-  
 “deemed his people,

2. “And hath raised up an horn of  
 “salvation for us, in the house  
 “of his servant David.”

IN the Old Testament, we read con-  
 tinually of Saviours and Deliverers  
 “raised up” by God, to rescue his peo-  
 ple, from time to time, out of the hands  
 of their oppressors. But of them we  
 may say, as the Apostle does of the  
 Levitical priests, “They were not suf-  
 “fered to continue, by reason of death.”  
 And therefore, we may argue in one  
 case, as he doth in the other, that none  
 of them could be the true Saviour of  
*Israel*, the subject of the promises.  
 Neither *Moses*, who brought them out  
 of *Egypt*, nor *Joshua* who settled them  
 in *Canaan*, was “He that should come,”  
 but they were still to “look for ano-  
 “ther.” And so on, through the whole  
 calendar of temporal favours, who,  
 like the legal ministers, “served only,”

<sup>a</sup> Heb. vii. 23.



by their wars and victories, "to the SECT. II.  
"example and shadow of heavenly  
"things." The body, or substance, in  
either instance, "was of Christ." For  
he who arose "a Priest for ever," arose  
also "a King immortal;" a mighty  
*horn*, or *power* of salvation; a *Moses*, to  
deliver us from this present evil world;  
a *Joshua*, to put us in possession of the  
heavenly *Canaan*; in short, every thing,  
to fill up every prefigurative character.  
This mighty Saviour, this omnipotent  
king of *Israel* God raised up "in the  
"house of his servant David," as he  
had promised, "that of the fruit of his  
"body according to the flesh, he would  
"raise up Christ to sit on his throne<sup>a</sup>."  
And to this agree the words of the an-  
gel, at the annuntiation, "The Lord  
"God shall give unto him the throne  
"of his father David, and he shall  
"reign for ever and ever over the house  
"of Jacob, and of his kingdom there  
"shall be no end<sup>b</sup>."

<sup>a</sup> Psalm cxxxii, 11. Acts ii. 30.

<sup>b</sup> Luke i. 32.

## SECT. II.

“As he promised by the mouth  
“of his holy prophets, which  
“have been since the world  
“began—”

In a matter of so great consequence  
as man's redemption, God left not the  
world without information, from the  
beginning: so that wherever we find  
ignorance, it must be charged to the  
account of man, as having rejected, and  
not to that of his Maker,--as having  
denied the necessary means of instruc-  
tion. We see the christian church now  
supported, in her belief of Messiah's  
second advent, on which all her hopes  
are fixed, by the discourses of the  
Apostles, as the antient church was  
supported in her belief of his first ad-  
vent, by the discourses of the prophets.  
There is no more difficulty in one case  
than in the other. The ancients lived in  
faith, and so do we. They died in faith,  
“not having received the promises,”  
and so must we: for though some pro-  
mises are fulfilled, yet others are not,  
not can be, in this world. Our know-

lege

lege is not the less certain, nor our faith, SECT. II.  
 built upon it, the less firm, because we  
 have not exact and adequate notions of  
 the manner of Christ's coming, the cir-  
 cumstances of the last judgment, and  
 the glory that is to follow. The *facts*  
 are sufficiently predicted; for an idea of  
 the *mode* we must be contented to wait,  
 till faith shall give place to sight. And  
 let the same observation be applied to  
 the patriarchs and *Israelites*.  
 That we should be saved  
 from our enemies, and from  
 the hand of all that hate us.  
 The enemies and the *salvation*, here  
 intended by *Zacharias*, are, without  
 doubt, spiritual. Such a salvation  
 therefore, from such enemies, God  
 "promised by the mouth of his holy  
 "prophets which have been since the  
 "world began." When he saved his  
 people of old from *their* enemies, and  
 from the hand of all that hated *them*,  
 his mercy so displayed was a figure for  
 the time then present, a pledge and  
 earnest of eternal redemption; as if he  
 D had

SECT. II. had said, "Ye shall see greater things  
 "than these." And the psalms, formerly  
 composed to celebrate the deliverance of  
 Israel from Egyptian and Babylonian cap-  
 tivities, are now used by the church  
 Christian to praise God for salvation  
 from sin, death, and Satan: they are  
 sung *new* in the kingdom of Mes-  
 siah. "Old things are passed away, be-  
 "hold all things are become new: all  
 legal figures are vanished, and the terms  
 employed to describe them are transfer-  
 red to Evangelical truths. When the  
 prophets composed psalms on occasion of  
 temporal deliverances, they looked for-  
 ward to a future spiritual salvation, as  
*Zacharias*, in his hymn, the subject of  
 which is a spiritual salvation, looks  
 back, and has a reference to past tem-  
 poral deliverances.

§. "To perform the mercy promi-  
 "sed to our fathers, and to re-  
 "member his holy covenant."  
 THE "mercy promised to our fa-  
 "thers" was, therefore, a spiritual mer-  
 cy; and the "covenant" made with  
 them



them was a gospel covenant; for other-  
 wise, God could not be said, by raising  
 up Christ, to have performed that  
 "mercy," and "remembered that co-  
 venant." Accordingly, we are else-  
 where told, "the Gospel was preached  
 "to Abraham;" and the covenant  
 made with him is styled "the covenant  
 "of God in Christ." The Gospel,  
 then, was prior to the law, and was the  
 patrimony of all the children of *Abra-  
 ham*. "The law, which was four hun-  
 "dred and thirty years after, whatever  
 might be it's intention, could not dis-  
 possess them of this their inheritance;  
 it could not disannul the covenant,  
 "and make the promise of none effect.  
 But if, on the contrary, it was designed  
 to keep up, and further the knowledge  
 of them; if it was a standing prophecy;  
 if it was "a schoolmaster," by it's ele-  
 ments training up and conducting it's  
 scholars "to Christ;" then certainly no-  
 thing was wanting on the part of God.  
 The Jews minded earthly things; but to  
 infer from thence, that they were never

<sup>a</sup> Gal. iii. 8.

<sup>b</sup> *Ibid.* 17.

SECT. II. taught the knowledge of things heavenly, would be a method of arguing too hazardous to be ventured upon, since, from the behaviour of many, who profess the Christian religion, it might as fairly be concluded, that *their* Master promised nothing but "loaves and fishes." *Israelites* might set their hearts too much on "fields and vineyards," forgetting or neglecting better things, as men are apt to do, who are blessed with prosperity in this present world. But when they did so, they did wrong: prophets were sent to reprove the error, and judgments to convince them, that *Canaan* was not the end of the "covenant," nor a plentiful harvest "the mercy promised."

6. "THE oath which he sware to  
"our forefather Abraham --"

THE amazing condescension of God in vouchsafing, for man's satisfaction and assurance, to confirm his promise by an oath, is finely touched upon in the epistle to the *Hebrews*. "When  
"God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he  
"sware"

“sware by himself, saying, surely bleſſ-  
 “ing I will bleſs thee and multiplying  
 “I will multiply thee. For men  
 “verily ſwear by a greater, and an oath  
 “for confirmation is to them an end of  
 “all ſtrife. Wherein God, willing to  
 “ſhew to the heirs of promiſe the im-  
 “mutability of his counſel, confirmed  
 “it by an oath; that by two immuta-  
 “ble things, in which it was impoſ-  
 “ſible for God to lie, we might have  
 “a ſtrong conſolation, who have fled  
 “for refuge, to lay hold upon the hope  
 “ſet before us.” O the goodness of  
 God, who hath given his creatures the  
 aſſurance of an oath! O the infidelity  
 of his creatures, who diſtruſt that aſſu-  
 rance<sup>b</sup>!

7. “That he would grant unto  
 “us, that we being delivered  
 “out of the hands of our ene-  
 “mies, might ſerve him with-  
 “out fear,

<sup>a</sup> Heb. vi. 13.

<sup>b</sup> O beatos nos, quorum cauſa Deus jurat! O miſerri-  
 mos, ſi nec juranti Domino credimus! Tertull.

8. “In

## SECT. II.



8. "In holiness and righteousness  
before him, all the days of  
our life."

THE promise, made with an oath to *Abraham*, was made, after the intentional sacrifice of *Isaac*, in the following terms; "By myself have I sworn  
"--- that in blessing I will bless thee;  
"and in multiplying I will multiply  
"thy seed as the stars of heaven, and  
"as the sand which is upon the sea  
"shore; and thy seed shall possess the  
"gate of his enemies; and in thy seed  
"shall all the nations of the earth be  
"blessed." The objects of the blessing here promised are the faithful children of *Abraham*, whether Jews or Gentiles; the "seed," in whom they are blessed, is Christ; the manner in which he obtains the blessing, is by possessing the gate of his enemies, that is, by subduing them, and seizing their strong holds; the blessing itself consisteth in a redemption from bondage under those enemies, and an admission into

<sup>a</sup> Gen. xxii. 16.



the service of God. Such is the substance and intention of the promise made with an oath to *Abraham*, as explained by *Zacharias*, and fulfilled under the gospel. In the mean time, between the promise and its accomplishment it pleased God to interpose a dispensation, which exhibited a visible representation of this great and important transaction, in the case of the children of *Israel*, or the posterity of *Abraham* according to the flesh, who, after having been long detained in cruel bondage by *Pharaoh* and the *Egyptians*, were “delivered out of the hands of “their enemies;” and delivered for this purpose, that they might serve God with a prefigurative service, calculated to last “till the seed should come, to “whom the promise was made.” For thus *Jehovah* saith to *Moses*, “When “thou hast brought forth the people “out of Egypt, they shall serve God “upon this mountain.” So that when, at the transfiguration of our Lord upon mount *Tabor*, *Moses* discoursed with him on the subject of “his decease,”

\* Exod. xiii. 12.

or,

SECT. II. or, as it is in the original, his *Exodus*,  
“ which he should accomplish at Jeru-  
“ salem,” may we not imagine to our-  
selves the deliverer of *Israel* addressing the  
world’s Redeemer in some such words as  
these --- By my hand the Lord God of  
*Israel* did once vouchsafe to bring forth  
his people from the afflicting bondage  
of *Egypt*; but thou shalt turn the mul-  
titude of the Gentiles from the power  
of Satan to God. I saw the Lord make  
a path through the waters, for his re-  
deemed to pass over; but thou shalt  
find a more wonderful way through the  
waves of death; and though the floods  
shall compass thee about, yet shall thy  
life be brought up from corruption. I  
beheld the chariots of *Pharaoh* and the  
mighty host of *Egypt* plunging in the  
deep, when the morning appeared; but  
thou shalt triumph over principalities  
and powers, and see them overwhelmed  
in the lake of fire. I led my people  
through the wilderness, and gave them  
a law which had “ the shadow of good  
“ things to come;” but thou shalt con-  
duct thine through the world, and  
teach them to “ worship in spirit and  
“ in

"in truth." I went before *Israel* to SECT. II.  
the borders of the promised land; but  
thou art the true shepherd of souls, and  
they who follow thee shall "pass from  
"death unto life."

*Zacharias* concludes his divine song  
with an apostrophe to the infant Bap-  
tist, as one who was designed by provi-  
dence to be the precursor of such a  
Saviour, and the publisher of such sal-  
vation.

9. "And thou child shalt be called  
"the prophet of the Highest,  
"for thou shalt go before the  
"face of the Lord, to prepare  
"his ways;

10. "To give knowledge of salvation  
"unto his people for the remis-  
"sion of their sins ---"

"THE law *prophefied* until John,"  
who succeeded it in it's office of point-  
ing out the Messiah, and spake the lan-  
guage of it's institutions, when he said,  
"Behold the Lamb of God, which  
"taketh away the sin of the world."

E

"Re-

SECT. II. "Remission of sins" is the doctrine in which the Christian religion justly glorieth, as that most necessary and fundamental point, in which every other religion fails. The heathen confesseth himself to be in the dark; he guesseth only what is the will of God, whom he knoweth not. He hath not strength to perform what he imagineth to be such; and he understandeth not the meaning of the sacrifices and lustrations derived to him by tradition. The blood of bulls and goats cannot wash away the sins of the Jew; and his oblations, since the truth is come, which they were intended to prefigure, are preposterous, and impious. The Mahometan hath no evidence for the mission of his prophet, no argument for his religion but the sword, and no heaven but sense. The doctrine of "salvation by the remission of sins," through faith in a Redeemer, was, from the beginning, the sum and substance of true religion, which subsisted in promise, prophecy, and figure, till *John* preached their accomplishment in the person of *Jesus*. Paganism was a corruption of it  
before



before that time, as Mahometism hath SECT. II.  
been since; and modern Judaism is an  
apostasy from it. And will Christians  
go away, and forsake their Redeemer?  
To whom can they go? He hath the  
words of eternal life: he only can give  
“salvation by the remission of sins.” It  
is this religion which enlightens the un-  
derstanding with true knowlege, and  
warms the heart with true charity: it  
is this which alone brings confidence,  
and comfort, and joy, and bids fear and  
despondency fly away: it is this which  
raises the soul; as it were, from the  
dead, puts new vigour into all her  
powers and faculties, and animates her  
to duty, by the powerful motives it  
suggesteth: it is this which is a coun-  
terbalance to the temptations of sense,  
by the promises made to our faith;  
which supports the infirmity of nature  
by the glorious objects proposed to our  
hope; and which triumphs over the  
opposition of the world, by the love of  
God shed abroad in our hearts: it pro-  
cures us the only solid happiness there  
is in this world, and opens a way to the  
felicities of the next: it holds him out

## SECT. II.

to us, who is our "shield" on earth, and will be our "exceeding great reward" in heaven; who "guides us with his counsel, and will, after that, receive us to glory --- Whom have we in heaven, O Lord, but thee; and there is none upon earth we can desire in comparison of thee!"

11. "--- Through the tender mercy of our God; whereby the day-spring from on high hath visited us,

12. "To give light to them that sit in darkness, and in the shadow of death, to guide our feet into the way of peace."

St. John was the morning-star, that preceded the sun of righteousness at his rising; an event, the glory of which is due to "the tender mercy of our God," since towards the production of it man could do no more than he can do towards causing the natural sun to rise upon the earth. The blessed effects of the day-

<sup>a</sup> Psalm lxxiii. 24.

spring which then dawned from on SECT. II.  
 high, and gradually increased more and  
 more unto the perfect day, were --- the  
 disperſion of ignorance, which is the  
 darkneſs of the intellectual world; the  
 awakening of men from ſin, which is  
 the ſleep of the ſoul; and the conver-  
 ſion and direction of their hearts and  
 inclinations into “the way of peace,”

that is, of reconciliation to God by the  
 blood of Chriſt, to themſelves by the  
 answer of a conſcience cleaned from  
 ſin, and to one another by mutual love.

“Happy is the people that is in ſuch a  
 “caſe; yea, happy is the people, whoſe  
 “God is the Lord. They are the  
 “children of the light and of the  
 “day. Their ſun ſhall no more go  
 “down, neither ſhall their moon with-  
 “draw itſelf; for the Lord ſhall be un-  
 “to them an everlaſting light, and the  
 “days of their mourning ſhall be  
 “ended.”

## SECTION III.

*Considerations on St. John's education in the deserts.*

## SECT. III.

ALL the information we have concerning St. John, from the time of his birth to that of his public appearance, is contained in the few following words --- "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, and was in the deserts till the day of his shewing unto Israel." There, apart from the world, and under the tuition of heaven, he was catechized in the principles of divine wisdom, initiated into the mystery of a holy life, and perfected in the discipline of self-denial;

*The moss his bed, the cave his humble cell,  
His food the fruits, his drink the crystal well:  
Remote from man, with God he pass'd the days,  
Pray'r all his bus'ness, all his pleasure praise.*

PARNELL.

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 80.

THIS



THIS dispensation in the case of the SECT. III.  
Baptist, like many others relative to the  
prophets, was extraordinary and mira-  
culous; consequently, not to be literally  
copied by any one, but in similar cir-  
cumstances, and under a supernatural  
direction. Nor has the monastic scheme  
the sanction of so great an example; as  
St. John was under the obligation of no  
vow, but having finished his preparation  
in solitude, came forth to act his part  
upon the theatre of the world. And it  
is well known, that, even in those ages  
when mankind stood astonished at the  
austerities practised by recluses and ere-  
mites, the episcopal or sacerdotal  
character was reckoned as much supe-  
rior to the other, as charity is better  
than contemplation. "In solitude,"  
saith a great master of this subject, "a  
" man may go to heaven by the way of  
" prayer and devotion; but in society  
" he carries others with him by the  
" way of mercy and charity. In soli-  
" tude there are fewer temptations, but  
" then there is likewise the exercise of  
" fewer virtues. Solitude is a good  
" school, and the world the best theatre.  
" The

SECT. III.

The institution is best there, the practice here. The wilderness hath the advantage of discipline, but society furnisheth the opportunities of perfection. To confirm this judicious state of the case, it may be observed, that the only perfect life which hath ever been led on earth, was a mixture of the solitary and social. Our Lord himself passed thirty years in the privacy of *Nazareth*; and then appeared in public to exercise his ministry; but still not without frequent intervals of retirement. It was in solitude that he kept his vigils; the desert places heard him pray; in the wilderness he vanquished Satan; upon a mountain apart he was transfigured. But in public he preached the Gospel, and converted souls; in public he healed the sick, and cast out devils; in public he suffered, and, while he redeemed the world, set it a pattern of humility, patience, and charity.

FROM the circumstance of St. John's education in the deserts we may, therefore, venture to draw a conclusion which will be of general use, with regard to

all  
 6.} See *Bl. Taylor's Life of Christ, Part. I. c.*  
*ad Sect. VIII. 3. 6. 7.*

all ministers of the Gospel, viz. that SECT. III.  
the solitary way of life is necessary to  
qualify them for the offices of the so-  
cial; or, that he who would serve God  
acceptably in public, must first prepare  
himself for that purpose in private.  
The reason is, because no man is pro-  
perly qualified to teach *wisdom* and *holi-  
ness*, who doth not himself possess them.  
And a little reflection will convince us,  
how needful retirement is for the ac-  
quisition of both.

THE toils undergone by all who  
have ever made any great proficiency in  
*wisdom*, plainly prove close application  
and deep attention to be requisite for  
it's attainment. And they who imagine  
themselves to have discovered a shorter  
way, conducting them to it without  
study, will find, sooner or later, that  
they have mistaken their road. "Hardly  
"do we guess aright at things that are  
"upon earth, and with labour do we  
"find the things that are before us:"  
shall we then expect a knowledge of  
those which are of a high and spiritual  
nature, without any labour at all? The

Wisdom. ix. 16.

SECT. III. prophets themselves <sup>a</sup> “enquired and  
 “searched diligently what things the  
 “spirit of Christ, which was in them,  
 “did signify.” The royal Preacher,  
 endued from above with “largeness of  
 “heart as the sand upon the sea shore,”  
 yet took pains, and those no slight ones,  
 in the invention and disposition of his  
 discourses. For, “in order to teach the  
 “people knowledge, he gave good heed,  
 “and sought out and set in order many  
 “proverbs; yea, the preacher sought  
 “to find out acceptable words, words  
 “of uprightness and truth.” And if  
 Solomon were not exempted from study  
 and meditation, no other man can have  
 any title to hope for such a privilege.  
 BUT who shall be able to fix his at-  
 tention, amidst the hurry and dissipa-  
 tion of life? Who can meditate on  
 wisdom, with the noise of folly found-  
 ing incessantly in his ears? That blessed  
 person, who could suffer no distraction  
 of thought from the objects around  
 him, withdrew from the multitude, that  
 he might teach us to do the same, who,

<sup>a</sup> 1 Pet. i. 10.

<sup>b</sup> Eccles. xii. 9.

alas,



alas, are often unable, when alone, to SECT. III.  
 confine our thoughts, for a few minutes  
 together, to one subject. The world,  
 like *Martha*, is "troubled about many  
 things," and most about those which  
 are of least concern, so that, besides  
 the profane, the unseemly, and un-  
 charitable discourses, which they must  
 hear who are much conversant with it,  
 the mind of a man suffers not a little  
 from the variety of light and unprofit-  
 able conversation in which he is fre-  
 quently engaged. This scatters the  
 thoughts, and so indisposes them for any  
 speculations that are great and noble,  
 sublime and sacred, that some time is  
 required to reduce the wanderers, to  
 compose the spirits, and to restore that  
 tranquillity of soul which is indispen-  
 sably necessary for the prosecution of  
 religious enquiries. And although the  
 general assertion of a famous recluse,  
 "that he always came out of company  
 "a worse man than he went into it,"  
 favoureth too much of the cloister, yet  
 whoever, as the world goes, should di-  
 ligently note the times when he came  
 out of company a *better* man than he

SECT. III. went into it, might, perhaps, find his diary contained in a less compass, than at present he is apt to imagine.

CERTAINLY, however, it is, that for the productions of wisdom we are indebted to solitude, as the parent of attention. And therefore many, in all ages, have followed St. *John* into the wilderness, and chosen retirement, not out of any moroseness of temper, or misanthropy, but that they might give themselves, without let or molestation, to the pursuit of divine knowledge. In this situation, they found themselves always at liberty to chuse their companions. They could converse at pleasure with patriarchs and prophets, apostles, martyrs, and confessors, with devout and learned bishops, and others, who once adorned the church by their lives, and have continued, since their deaths, through many generations, to edify her by their writings. Here they could rally their scattered thoughts, and fix them upon subjects, whence they might extract real profit, and durable pleasure. For meditations, while employed, in a general and cursory way, upon a variety of

of objects, like the rays of light diffused in the air, discover not the force and activity which they possess; it is close attention which collects and unites, and renders them operative. And an ability to bestow that close attention in a crowd, is granted to very few among the sons of men.

A DISPASSIONATE and unprejudiced state of mind is another requisite for the attainment of true wisdom. And as our sentiments take the tincture of our company, persons continually engaged in the world are very liable to be corrupted, as well as dissipated. He who passeth his time with men of base and antisciptural tenets, will insensibly become one of them, and will find, when it is too late, that "evil communications corrupt" good principles, as well as "good manners." The understanding will be blinded, and the heart hardened; wisdom will be shut out at every avenue; and the man will sit down in darkness and depravity, for the remainder of his days, determining with himself that there is no such thing as truth, without ever being at the trouble of making the enquiry.

SECT. III. enquiry. Happy, therefore, is he who, like St. *John*, spendeth his early days in privacy, and there acquainteth himself betimes with the excellencies and perfections of divine wisdom. For “Wisdom is glorious, and never fadeth away; yea, she is easily seen of them that love her, and found of such as seek her. She preventeth them that desire her, in making herself first known unto them. Whoso seeketh her early shall have no great travel, for he shall find her sitting at his doors.”

UPON the same principle, we may account it one of the no small advantages which St. *John* enjoyed by his retreat into the wilderness, that he was thereby delivered from the vain janglings of the many religious sects and factions, at that time in *Judea*. For the authors and abettors of such are naturally confined in their views, and obstructed in their search after truth, by having assumed it for a first principle, that “they are the men, and that wisdom must needs live and die with

\* Wisdom. vi. 12.

“them.”



“them.” Hence they become more SECT. III.  
solicitous about the defence of their own  
particularities against those of other sec-  
taries, than careful to advance and pro-  
pagate the general principles of true re-  
ligion. This hath been but too much  
the case for some time past in Christen-  
dom, which, like *Jerusalem* before it's  
destruction, is crumbled into innumer-  
able parties, biting and devouring one  
another, insomuch that it is now diffi-  
cult for one writer to lay down a posi-  
tion in theology, which another shall  
not immediately set himself to contro-  
vert with all his might, as heretical and  
antichristian. The dispute soon becomes  
a trial of skill, and the passions and pre-  
judices of the combatants spread a cloud  
over the question, in which truth and  
charity often vanish together. Thus  
dark and tempestuous are these lower  
regions. But, by study and meditation  
in solitude, the Christian, in heart and  
mind, ascendeth to a purer element,  
from whence he beholdeth the storms  
produced by contending factions far be-  
neath him, and expatieth at pleasure  
in those fields of light and serenity,  
which

SECT. III. which open themselves on all sides to his view. He consoleth himself by contemplating the church, as she formerly subsisted in original purity and unity, and as she will hereafter exist in her triumphant state above, when her members of every age and nation shall all lift up their voices together, and make their sound to be heard as one, in giving Glory to God, and to the Lamb. Disencumbered of passions and prejudices, he followeth after the truth which leadeth to godliness, and the wisdom whose end is salvation.

For the attainment of that wisdom a third thing requisite is divine illumination. Wisdom is one of those "good and perfect gifts," which "come down from the Father of lights" and must be sued for, with humility and fervour, in petitions like these --- "Give me wisdom that sitteth by thy throne, and reject me not from among thy children --- For though a man be never so perfect among the children of men, yet if thy wisdom be not with him, he shall be nothing regarded --- O send her out of thy holy heavens,

“heavens, and from the throne of thy  
 “glory, that being present she may la-  
 “bour with me, that I may know what  
 “is pleasing unto thee. For she know-  
 “eth and understandeth all things, and  
 “she shall lead me soberly in my do-  
 “ings, and preserve me by her power  
 “-- For what man is he that can  
 “know the counsel of God; or who  
 “can think what the will of the Lord  
 “is, except thou give wisdom, and send  
 “thy Holy Spirit from above?” Such  
 gracious promises are made, and are  
 ready to be fulfilled to the retired Chris-  
 tian. Let but the pollutions and dis-  
 tractions of the world be removed, and  
 the wisdom which “is first pure, and  
 “then peaceable,” will enter in. To  
 receive the law, *Moses* was called away  
 from the congregation to the top of the  
 mount. -- *Ezekiel* beheld the visions of  
 God, while a solitary captive upon the  
 banks of *Chabar*. *Daniel* was informed  
 concerning the restoration of *Jerusalem*,  
 and the advent of *Messiah*, on the even-  
 ing of a day dedicated to retirement,  
 for the purposes of fasting and prayer.

Wisd. ix. 4.

G

St. John

SECT. III. St. John was an exile in the desolate  
 Patmos, when the glorious scenes described in the book of Revelation were made to pass before him, and he was enabled to extend his view, through all the different revolutions of empires, and periods of the church to the end of time. And although we no more look for visions and revelations from heaven, yet from thence we expect, according to the most sure promise of our Master, the gift of the Spirit, to bless and prosper us in our studies, to open to us the scriptures, and our understandings, that we may understand them. The same Spirit that gave the word, giveth likewise the interpretation thereof. And the latter, as well as the former, is best received in solitude, which appears to be thus admirably calculated for the attainment of wisdom, as it requireth study and attention, a dispassionate and unprejudiced mind, and that illumination which is from on high.

SIN, in the language of scripture, is styled folly, to intimate to us, that true wisdom and holiness are inseparable companions. That, therefore, which  
 con-



conducteth to the acquisition of one, SECT. III.  
 can never bear an unfavourable aspect  
 towards the other; and solitude will be  
 found the best nurse of *sanctity*, more  
 particularly as it consisteth in the exer-  
 cise of mortification.

THIS is a work, which no man can  
 set about, until he knoweth what those  
 failings are, to which he is subject. And  
 such is the power of self-love, that the  
 person concerned is generally the last  
 who comes to a knowledge of this most  
 important point. If neither the fidelity  
 of his friends nor the malice of his ene-  
 mies let him into the secret, there is  
 only a third way in which it is possible  
 for him to become master of it, which  
 is self-examination, constantly, sincerely,  
 and thoroughly practised. And this re-  
 quireth stated seasons of retirement;  
 for want of which, we see those, who  
 are engaged in a circle of business, or  
 pleasures, living entire strangers to them-  
 selves and their own infirmities, though  
 intimately acquainted with the follies  
 and foibles of all around them. "In  
 the night," the psalmist tells us, he  
 communed with his own heart, and

SECT. III. "his spirit made diligent search<sup>a</sup>."

Then silence and solitude afforded him an opportunity of scrutinizing the tempers of his soul, of discovering the maladies to which he was inclined, and of applying the proper remedies to each.

THAT medicines may be administered with success, it is necessary to cut off the provisions, which nourish and increase the disorder. The world, in the case before us, is full of such provisions; and therefore the patient must withdraw, for a while, from the influence of it's temptations. "Where no wood is, the fire goeth out<sup>b</sup>." Remove the object, and the passion will by degrees die away. In solitude, the pleasures and glories of the world no longer strike upon the senses, and solicit the affections. The soul, therefore, in this situation, like one escaped out of a battle to a place of security, hath leisure to reflect upon her condition, and to provide for her future safety. By looking into herself, she perceiveth how much she standeth in need of mercy

<sup>a</sup> Ps. lxxvii. 6.

<sup>b</sup> Prov. xxvi. 20.

and grace; and then she is naturally led to look up to heaven, as the only place from whence they are to be obtained. The former of these prospects filleth her with compunction, and causeth her to mourn for her sins with that godly sorrow which worketh a repentance never to be repented of; the latter encourageth her to pour forth herself in continual prayer to the God of her salvation, until he have mercy upon her. St. Peter, when reminded of his offence by the crowing of the cock, and the affectionate look of an abjured Master, went out from the high priest's hall where he was, and in solitude, with strong crying and tears, made supplication for pardon and peace. In retirement it is, that we find ourselves best able to practise all the holy arts of abstinence and self-denial, so needful for the perfecting repentance by mortifying the whole body of sin.

WHEN men cannot be induced voluntarily to take this course, they are often forced into it by Providence visiting them with some heavy calamity, which by a stroke, like the amputation

of

## SECT. III.

of a limb, severe but salutary, separating them at once from the world, shall oblige them to converse first with themselves, and then with God. Thus was *Babylon's* haughty monarch driven, in an extraordinary manner, from society, to learn humility in the fields and woods, until he acknowledged the power and the righteousness of the King of heaven. And thus the idolatrous and superlatively wicked *Manasseh* became a sincere and hearty penitent in the solitude of a *Chaldean* prison. Nor can we but admire, upon this occasion, the wisdom and goodness of God in sending sickness, as a preparative for death. Sickness takes a man, as it were, out of this scene of things, to fit him for another. It draws the curtain between him and the world, shutting out all its cares, and all its pleasures. It puts away his idle and noisy acquaintance far from him; and having thus secured his attention to the one thing needful, gives him ideas of the nature of sin, and the importance of death, the vanities of time, and the glories of eternity, to which he was before an utter stranger.

Now



Now appear to him, in their proper SECT. III.  
colours and natural deformity, the diabolical nature of pride and envy, the brutality of intemperance, the folly and torment of lasciviousness, the wretchedness of avarice, and the stupidity of sloth. Now he hath no longer any unlawful desires, and grieves that he ever had such. Now he is what he always ought to have been, and what retirement, at proper seasons, should and would have made him.

In morality, as in husbandry, the preparation of the soil is a great step towards the production of a plentiful harvest. If carnal desires are dead in us, all things belonging to the Spirit will live and grow in us. If the affections are disengaged from things on earth, the difficulty of the work is over; they will readily and eagerly lay hold on things above, when proposed to them. If the snare of concupiscence be broken, and the soul be delivered out of it, she will presently fly away, on the wings of faith and charity, towards heaven. They who have duly practised mortification in the school of retirement, will,

at

SECT. III. at their appearance in the world, afford  
it the brightest examples of every thing  
that is "honest, just, pure, lovely, and  
"of good report."

WE may, therefore, conclude, that  
he who desires to undertake the office  
of guiding others in the ways of *wis-*  
*dom* and *holiness*, will best qualify him-  
self for that purpose by first passing some  
time in a state of sequestration from the  
world; where anxious cares and delu-  
sive pleasures may not break in upon  
him, to dissipate his attention; where  
no sceptical or sectarian spirit may blind  
his understanding, and nothing may  
obstruct the illumination from above;  
where every vicious inclination may be  
mortified through grace, by a prudent  
application of the proper means; and  
every fresh bud of virtue, sheltered from  
noxious blasts, may be gradually reared  
up into strength, beauty, and fragrance;  
where, in a word, "he may grow and  
"wax strong in spirit, until the day of  
"his shewing unto Israel."

SECTION IV.

*Considerations on the Prophecies relative to St. John in the Old Testament.*

**B**EFORE we proceed to view the SECT. IV.  
Baptist in the exercise of his ministry, it will be proper to look back to the predictions in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, concerning his office and character. We shall begin with that remarkable one, "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord. And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to their fathers, lest I come, and smite the earth with a curse<sup>a</sup>."

As there was amongst the Jews a general expectation of Messiah's appearance, at the time when he did appear, so an opinion likewise prevailed, that the world should be first prepared for his reception, in some extraordinary

<sup>a</sup> Mal. iv. 5, 6.

SECT. IV. manner. But wrong ideas of his appearance and kingdom introduced mistakes with regard to the person who should precede and proclaim him. According to the notions then current, occasioned by applying to his first advent the prophecies which belonged to his second, Messiah was to come in power and majesty, to confer on the sons of *Jacob* dominion over the Gentiles, and make *Jerusalem* the metropolis of the world. And by misunderstanding this prediction of *Malachi*, they had imagined, that *Elijah* the *Tishbite* should return from heaven, as his precursor. For this reason it was, that when the sanhedrim sent a message to *St. John*, desiring to know, whether he were *Elias*? he answered, "I am not:" not the *Elias* by them intended and expected. But that *St. John* was the person foretold by *Malachi* under the name of *Elias*, we have the declarations of our Lord himself to his own disciples, "Elias is indeed come;" and to the Jews, "If ye will receive it, this is Elias which was for to come. He

\* Mark ix. 13.

" that



“that hath ears to heary let him hear.” SECT. IV.  
By these expressions it was evidently  
Christ’s intention to put his hearers up-  
on the search after something more than  
the words, in the bare letter of them,  
might seem to contain. He directed  
them to go deeper into things, to study  
with attention the mission of the Bap-  
tist, his office and character, to com-  
pare together persons, times, and events;  
and so to discover, in what sense *John*  
was *Elijah*, and why *Malachi* had given  
him that appellation. But if they did  
this, and were once brought, in the  
person of *John*, to acknowledge *Elias*  
who was to precede the Messiah, they  
must necessarily, in the person of *Jesus*,  
acknowledge the Messiah whom *Elias*  
was to precede. And therefore, as they  
were obstinately resolved not to own the  
Master, Christ knew they would not  
recognize the servant, or receive this  
saying concerning him. Thus when  
the chief priests and elders interrogated  
our Lord in the temple, “By what au-  
thority dost thou these things, or  
“who gave thee this authority? I will

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xii. 14.

SECT. IV. "also," said he, "ask you one question, "The baptism of John, was it from heaven, or of men?" They perceived the dilemma, and having considered consequences, made the only *safe* answer, "We cannot tell," an answer which did honour to their prudence and their caution, but certainly at the expence either of their wisdom, or their honesty. As sitting in the chair of *Moses*, they ought to have known whence the baptism of *John* was; and if they did know, they ought not to have been shy of declaring it.

THAT St. *John* was the *Elias* predicted by *Malachi*, we have also the testimony of the angel; at the annuntiation of his birth, who cites the very words of the prophet; "He shall go before him in the spirit and power of "Elias, to turn the hearts of the fathers to the children" &c. And if this be the case, it follows by necessary inference, that by the great and dreadful day of the Lord," before the coming of which *Elijah* is promised, *Malachi* intends,

Matt. xxi. 23.  
Luke i. 7.

intends,

intends, primarily and immediately, the day, not of the world's, but of *Jerusalem's* destruction. For want of advert-  
 ing to this, an opinion hath prevailed among Christian interpreters, that the whole prophecy relateth principally to the day of judgment, and to the appearance of an *Elias*, who shall then precede Christ. Whether there will be such an *Elias* at that time, and so the second advent will symbolize with the first in the circumstance of being previously proclaimed by a harbinger, like St. John, sent for that purpose, is a speculation with which we shall not at present concern ourselves, resting satisfied with the application of the prophecy, upon infallible grounds, to the person of the Baptist, the undoubted forerunner of our Lord, when he came to visit us in great humility.

God punisheth not sinners, till he hath first invited them to repentance. He giveth fair warning before he striketh; and a day of grace, in which mercy may be sought, and pardon found, always goeth before a day of vengeance and extermination. *Elias* was sent “be-  
 “ fore

SECT. IV. "fore the coming of the great and  
 "dreadful day of the Lord;" John called his countrymen to turn from their sins, and believe in their Messiah, e'er yet the desolations of *Jerusalem* exhibited to the wondering nations a specimen of that almighty power and inflexible justice, which shall one day lay the world itself in ruins.

THE third chapter of *Malachi* containeth a most evident and clear prediction of Messiah's advent, with that of his precursor St. *John*. "Behold, I  
 "will send my messenger, and he shall  
 "prepare the way before me; and the  
 "Lord whom ye seek shall suddenly  
 "come to his temple, even the messenger of the covenant whom ye delight  
 "in: behold he shall come, saith the  
 "Lord of hosts." The prophet goes on to foretell the effects of Christ's advent in the selection of a peculiar people, and the purification of a new priesthood, to offer new and acceptable offerings. "But who may abide the day  
 "of his coming, and who shall stand,  
 "when he appeareth? For he is like a  
 "refiner's fire, and like fuller's soap.

And



“And he shall sit as a refiner and purifier of silver; and he shall purify the sons of Levi, and purge them as gold and silver, that they may offer unto the Lord an offering in righteousness. Then shall the offering of Judah and Jerusalem be pleasant unto the Lord, as in the days of old, and as in former years;” pleasant as in the days when their fathers offered in faith, and the desire of Messiah’s appearance was the ruling passion of their souls. The rest of the chapter is employed in reproving the rebellion, sacrilege, and infidelity of the Jews; and the fourth chapter opens with a description of the day fatal to *Jerusalem* --- “Behold the day cometh that shall burn as an oven, and all the proud, yea and all that do wickedly shall be stubble, and the day that cometh shall burn them up, saith the Lord of hosts, that it shall leave them neither root nor branch.” For the consolation of the faithful, God by his prophet again foretelleth Messiah’s advent, with the increase, victory, and triumph of the church --- “But unto you that fear my name, shall the sun

SECT. IV. "OF RIGHTEOUSNESS arise, with  
 "healing in his wings; and ye shall go  
 "forth, and grow up as the firstlings  
 "of bullocks: and ye shall tread down  
 "the wicked, for they shall be ashes  
 "under the soles of your feet, in the  
 "day that I shall do this, saith the Lord  
 "of hosts." In the mean time, "Re-  
 "member ye the law of Moses my ser-  
 "vant, which I commanded unto him  
 "in Horeb for all Israel, with the sta-  
 "tutes and judgments." And then,  
 when the law hath done it's office, and  
 prophesied for the appointed time,  
 "Behold I will send you Elijah the  
 "prophet;" not the personal Elijah,  
 but, as the angel expoundeth it, one  
 to preach and live after the model of  
 his example, in his "spirit and power."  
 Thus, in the prophecy of *Ezekiel*, where  
 God foretelleth the union of *Israel* and  
*Judah* in the days of Messiah, he saith,  
 "They shall be my people, and I will  
 "be their God, and David my servant  
 "shall be their prince for ever." Not  
 that Christ was to be *David* risen from  
 the dead, or, when he came, was to

<sup>a</sup> Ezek. xxxvii. 23.

bear his name, but was to be, in certain respects, like *David*, conquering the enemies, and sitting upon the throne of *Israel*. So the forerunner of Messiah was not to be *Elijah*, descended from heaven, nor was he, at his manifestation, to be called by that name, but was to be like him in his office and character. Such a messenger, saith God, "I will send, before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord," that is, the day that should "burn like an oven," the day of *Jerusalem's* destruction, mentioned in the first verse. "And he shall turn the heart of the fathers to the children, and the heart of the children to the fathers, lest I come and smite the earth," or "the land, with a curse." In the citation of this passage by the angel, one part of it is paraphrased — "To turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the disobedient to the wisdom of the just." The meaning of the whole seems to be, either, that men of every age and every disposition should be united in truth and charity; or, as some

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 17.

SECT. IV. learned expositors understand the passage, that St. *John* should bring many of the Jews to have the same heart and mind which their fathers and progenitors had, who feared God, and believed his promises; that so their fathers might, as it were, rejoice in them, and own them again for their children; in other words, that he should convert them to the faith of that Christ whom their fathers hoped in, and looked for; as it was said by the angel, "Many of the children of Israel shall he turn to the Lord their God;"<sup>a</sup> lest, all continuing obstinate in their unbelief, till the day when a rejected Saviour should visit an apostate people, the curse should be universal.

BESIDES these notices afforded us by *Malachi*, there is a prophecy on the same subject in the XI<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Isaiab*, to which St. *John* referred the priests and levites, when they pressed him, saying, "Who art thou, that we may give an answer to them that sent us? What sayest thou of thyself?" He said, I am the voice of one crying

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 16.



“in the wilderness, make straight the SECT. IV.

“way of the Lord, as said the prophet

“Esaia<sup>s</sup>.” But let us take a view of the whole context, as far as it concerns our present purpose.

Isa. XL. 1. “Comfort ye, comfort

“ye my people, saith your God.”

THE future manifestation of Christ's kingdom is represented to the prophet in spirit, with the concomitant signs and circumstances of it. He hears the voice of God directing his servants to comfort his people, by proclaiming certain glad tidings which had been communicated to them. These glad tidings were the tidings of the Gospel. The persons to whom they first came were *Zacharias*, the blessed Virgin, *Simeon*, and *Anna*, who composed sacred songs upon the occasion, and spake of Messiah's advent “to all such as looked for redemption “in Jerusalem.” The same tidings were afterwards published by the Baptist, then by Christ himself and his

<sup>a</sup> John i. 23.

<sup>b</sup> Luke ii. 38.

SECT. IV. apostles, and have been ever since preached by their successors, whose commission still runs --- "Comfort ye, comfort ye my people."

2. "SPEAK ye comfortably to Jerusalem, and cry unto her, that her warfare is accomplished, that her iniquity is pardoned: for she hath received of the Lord's hand double for all her sins."

Good news should be related with a suitable aspect and accent. The manner should correspond with the matter. "Speak ye comfortably," or, as it is in the Hebrew phraseology, "to the heart of Jerusalem;" let your words be as cordials, to revive and cheer her in the midst of her sorrows and sufferings. The topics of consolation, to be insisted on, are three. First, "Her warfare," or "appointed service, is accomplished;" the days of her continuance under the yoke of bondage are expired; the fullness of time is come, for her passing from that state into the glorious liberty of

of the sons of God; she will now be SECT. IV.  
 relieved from duty, and dismissed from  
 the station on which she hath so long  
 watched, in expectation of the promised  
 redemption; she will be “delivered out  
 “of the hands of her enemies, to serve  
 “God without fear.” Secondly, “Her  
 “iniquity is pardoned;” the expiation  
 is about to be made, which all her sa-  
 crifices and lustrations prefigured, which  
 all her prophets foretold; the blessed  
 person is born, in whom God is well  
 pleased, both granting and accepting  
 repentance unto “salvation by the re-  
 “mission of sins,” that men may be  
 “justified from all things from which  
 “they could not be justified BY the  
 “law of Moses,” although men were  
 justified UNDER that dispensation,  
 through faith in him that was then to  
 come, according to the Gospel preached  
 before unto *Abraham*. Thirdly, “She  
 “hath received of the Lord’s hand  
 “double for all her sins;” she hath re-  
 ceived greater benefits than she had de-  
 served punishments; mercy hath rejoic-  
 ed against judgment; where sin aboun-  
 ded, grace hath superabounded.

## SECT. IV.



3. "THE voice of him that crieth  
 "in the wilderness, prepare ye  
 "the way of the Lord, make  
 "straight in the desert a high  
 "way for our God."

ISAIAH, while reciting the divine injunctions to those whose office it should be to "comfort Jerusalem," seemeth to break off suddenly, as one interrupted in his discourse by the sound of a voice. And as if he had listened, and perceived it to be the sound of that voice which so many prophets and kings had desired to hear, and had not heard it, viz. the voice proclaiming the actual incarnation of Messiah, he breaks forth in transport, "The voice of him that crieth  
 "in the wilderness!"

*Hark! a glad voice the lonely desert  
 cheers;*

*Prepare the way! a God, a God ap-  
 pears.*

The voice which thus sounded in the prophet's ears, so long before it was really heard upon the earth, was that  
 of



of the Baptist, who, at the proper season, was sent, to dispose the hearts and affections of men for the reception of their Saviour, when he should make his appearance. SECT. IV.

4. "EVERY valley shall be exalted,  
"and every mountain and hill  
"made low: and the crooked  
"shall be made straight, and  
"the rough places plain."

THESE are the words of the prophet himself, unfolding the counsels of God concerning the manner in which Messiah's kingdom should be established in the world, and the alterations which must necessarily take place, in order to that end. "Every valley shall be exalted;" to the poor in spirit, the lowly and contrite souls, the Gospel shall be preached, and they shall be exalted in faith and hope --- "and every mountain and hill made low;" on the contrary, pride of every kind, and in every shape, whether exalting itself in judaical pharisaism, or in gentile philosophy, against the knowledge of God, shall be made

SECT. IV. made low, and subdued to the obedience of Christ: “and the crooked shall be “made straight;” truth and rectitude shall succeed to error and depravity — “and the rough places plain;” every thing that offendeth shall be removed, and all difficulties and inequalities smoothed, till unanimity and uniformity prevail. Thus shall the way be prepared for the King of Righteousness to visit his people, to dwell in them, and to walk among them.

5. “AND the glory of the Lord shall “be revealed, and all flesh shall “see it together; for the mouth “of the Lord hath spoken it.”

IMMEDIATELY after the proclamation and preparation made by the Baptist, the Divinity was revealed in human nature, God was manifested in the flesh, seen and conversed with by all ranks and degrees of men, high and low, rich and poor, Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and Saducees, publicans and sinners. The accomplishment of this part of *Isaiah's* prophecy is exactly related by

St.

St. John the Evangelist, in the following terms; <sup>SECT. IV.</sup> "The word was made flesh, and dwelt among us, and we beheld his GLORY, the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth."

Thus we have seen under what character the Baptist is held forth to us in the predictions of the prophets concerning him, as one who should go before Messiah in the spirit and power of Elias, to proclaim and prepare the way for the advent of God incarnate. How perfectly, during the course of his ministry, he filled up this character, will appear in the subsequent sections.

\* John i. 14.

## SECTION V.

*Considerations on the appearance, doctrine,  
and baptism of St. John.*

SECT. V.

**T**HE days of St. John's retirement were now ended, and he was to exchange the pleasures of contemplation for the far different scenes of an active life; to behold, with grief and indignation, the sins and follies of mankind, the sight of which must needs be more grating and afflicting to his righteous soul, than a garment of *camel's hair* could be to his body; to encounter the opposition of a world that would be sure to take arms against him, from the moment in which he stood forth a preacher of repentance and reformation. But no good could be done to others in solitude, no converts could be made in the deserts; and he must therefore quit even the most refined and exalted of intellectual enjoyments, as every minister of Christ should be ready to do, when




when charity dictates an attendance on the necessities of his fellow creatures. SECT.V.

YET let it be observed, that St. John was thirty years of age, when “the word of God came to him in the wilderness<sup>a</sup>,” and commissioned him to enter upon his ministry; and the holy Jesus likewise was of the same age, when inaugurated to his office, by the visible descent of the Spirit upon him at his baptism; to intimate, perhaps, that neither the exigences of mankind, nor a consciousness of abilities for the work, can be pleaded as a sufficient warrant for a man to run before he is sent, and take the sacred office upon himself, without a regular and lawful call. The institutions of God are not without a reason, and he will not be served by the breach of his commandments.

THE place to which the Baptist first repaired is styled “the wilderness of Judea<sup>b</sup>,” a country not like the vast and uninhabited *deserts* in which he was educated, but one thinly peopled, a

<sup>a</sup> Luke iii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Matt. iii. 1. Luke iii. 3.

 **SECT. V.** comparative wilderness, chosen by him on account of it's bordering on the river. Hither the inhabitants of the neighbouring cities and villages presently flocked in great numbers, attracted by the uncommon sanctity of the new preacher, who thus came forth, on a sudden, from the desarts, like one from another world, without any connections in this, that no attachment might take him off from the duties of his high calling, or any way impede him in the exercise of it; since a man's worst foes have often been those of his own household, and the ties of flesh and blood have been known to prevail, where tyrants have threatened and inflicted tortures, without effect. And as there is nothing so directly opposite to the profession of a prophet, nothing which so soon or so effectually sullies his reputation, as a tendency to indulgence and sensuality; in him, who was "more than a prophet"<sup>a</sup>, we must expect to find a perfect crucifixion of the flesh, with it's affections and lusts. "What went ye out into the wilderness to

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 9.

"see?"

“see? A man clothed in soft raiment<sup>a</sup>?” SECT. V.

No, the very reverse; a man, like his predecessor *Elijah*, coarsely attired; “his raiment of camel’s hair, with a leathern girdle about his loins;” and content with the plainest food that nature could provide for him; “his meat, locusts, and wild honey<sup>b</sup>,” a man, whose person, habit, and manner of life, were themselves a sermon, and the best illustration of the doctrine he was about to teach; a proper person to prepare the way for Christ, and introduce the law to the gospel; to shew men what effect the one ought to have upon them, in order to dispose them for the blessings of the other; that mercy might save from the wrath which justice had denounced, and Jesus comfort those whom *Moses* had caused to mourn.

THE actions of a prophet, who appears, like the Baptist, with an extraordinary mission, though they are not to be imitated by us according to the letter, may yet convey a moral of general use. There is no obligation upon

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 8.

<sup>b</sup> Ibid. iii. 4.

## SECT. V.

us to be clothed with *camel's hair*, and to eat *locusts and wild honey*, nor are we commanded to abstain wholly from *wine*, as *St. John* did, according to the prediction of the angel concerning him, delivered at the annuntiation of his birth, "He shall drink neither wine nor strong drink, and shall be filled with the Holy Ghost even from his mother's womb<sup>a</sup>." But who doth not here perceive, evidently marked out, the opposition between sensuality and the spirit of holiness, and the impossibility of their dwelling together under the same roof? "Into a malicious soul wisdom shall not enter, nor dwell in a body that is subject to sin. For the holy spirit of discipline will flee deceit, and remove from thoughts that are without understanding, and will not abide when unrighteousness cometh in<sup>b</sup>." As, therefore, "no man can say that Jesus is the Lord, but by the Holy Ghost<sup>c</sup>," who speaks in the scriptures, who enlightens our

<sup>a</sup> Luke i. 15.<sup>b</sup> Wisd. i. 4.<sup>c</sup> 1 Cor. xii. 3.



understandings to interpret them, and SECT.V.  
 who gives authority as well as ability  
 to preach that great truth revealed in  
 them, every minister of Christ, who  
 succeeds the Baptist in the blessed work  
 of calling men to salvation, should mor-  
 tify the lusts of the flesh, that the  
 graces of the Spirit may live and grow  
 in him.

By a thorough mortification of the  
 flesh, St. John had gained a compleat  
 victory over the world, which had no-  
 thing in it that he wanted. And herein  
 consisted that *greatness* of his character  
 foretold by the angel; "He shall be  
 "great in the sight of the Lord." Earthly  
 pageantry engages not the at-  
 tention of the spirits above, unless it  
 be to pity such as set their hearts upon  
 it. They discerned something more  
 truly great in the person of the Baptist,  
 when he came forth from the deserts,  
 than in that of a triumphant monarch,  
 at the head of his victorious army.  
 "Behold," saith our Lord, "they that  
 "wear soft clothing are in kings'

\* Luke i. 15.

"houses";

SECT. V.

“houses<sup>a</sup>,” look for them among the attendants upon the princes of this world, and not among my servants. They who thirst after temporal honours and advantages, must go where such things are to be had. And let them go any where, rather than come into the church, with these dispositions. For he who would persuade others to despise the world, while the love of it appears to direct and govern all his own actions, can expect no better success than it may be supposed St. Peter would have met with, had he invited those, who stood with him round the fire in the high priest’s hall, into the service of that master, whom they had just before heard him deny. “When thou art converted, strengthen thy brethren<sup>b</sup>,” attempt not to do it till then, lest thou not only fallest into condemnation thyself, but layest a stumbling block in the way of the weak, and causest the name of God and his gospel to be thus blasphemed through thy double-mindedness, while thy life is at variance with

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 8.<sup>b</sup> Luke xxii. 32.

thy

thy doctrine. He who undertakes to SECT. V.  
reprove the world, must be one whom  
the world cannot reprove. All eyes will  
be upon him; his actions, his words,  
his very gestures and looks will be ob-  
served and canvassed by his sharp sighted  
enemies. It will therefore behove one,  
so exposed on all sides, to abstain from  
the least appearance of evil, to stand at  
the utmost distance from temptation,  
and to prevent even the possibility of a  
suspicion. The ax must be laid to the  
root, and the passions mortified, till the  
man become, in the emphatical lan-  
guage of scripture, "dead to sin<sup>a</sup>," as  
a corpse is to the delights and concerns  
of life. "The dead know not any thing,  
"neither have they any more a portion  
"in any thing that is done under the  
"sun<sup>b</sup>."

STRANGE, therefore, as St. John's  
appearance and manner of life might at  
first seem, they were presently explain-  
ed, when he began to preach a doctrine  
harsh and distasteful to flesh and blood,  
as the garment he wore, and the food

<sup>a</sup> Rom. vi. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Eccles. ix. 5, 6.

SECT. V. on which he subsisted. "Repent ye;" that is, Be converted, or changed, in heart and mind, in principle and practice, from error to truth, from sin to righteousness, from the flesh to the Spirit, from the world to God; "for the kingdom of heaven is at hand;" a new and heavenly kingdom is about to be set up amongst you, with new and heavenly laws, under a new and heavenly king, the promised Messiah, and none but men of new and heavenly tempers and dispositions can possibly become the subjects of it. I am the person commissioned to prepare you for your happy change, by calling you to repentance, and to my baptism which is "the baptism of repentance, for the remission of sins," through faith in him "who cometh after me," to confer pardon and forgiveness. I am the messenger foretold by *Malachi* and *Isaiah*, sent in this manner to prepare the way of him who is your King, your Lord, and your God, now ready to be revealed, as the Saviour of men. "Repent ye, for the

<sup>a</sup> Matt. iii. 2.

<sup>b</sup> Luke iii. 3.

"king-



“kingdom of heaven is at hand.” Thus SECT. V.  
did St. *John* lay the foundations of the  
evangelical edifice in mortification and  
self-denial; nor did his blessed Master  
afterward propose the glories of a crown  
to any but those who should be ready  
to take up their cross in the way to  
them.

THE appearance of sanctity, put on  
by every impostor, is a proof of the in-  
fluence, which it hath, when genuine  
and unaffected, over the minds of men.  
The preacher will always be attended,  
who conforms to his own doctrine, and  
exemplifies it in his life, be that doc-  
trine ever so rigid. No sooner was it  
known, that *John*, the son of *Zacha-  
rias*, was come forth from the deserts,  
and had begun to preach, but “there  
“went out unto him Jerusalem, and all  
“Judea, and all the region round about  
“Jordan, and were baptized of him in  
“Jordan, confessing their sins.” The  
discourses of the Baptist were sharp and  
piercing as lancets. He applied them  
home to the human heart, swollen with  
pride, and full of iniquity. And indeed,

<sup>a</sup> Matt. iii. 5, 6.

SECT. V. much anxiety and wretchedness might be relieved, much despair and suicide might be prevented among us of this land, if the members of our church would but follow her direction, and as often as their minds were oppressed, and they could not quiet their own consciences, go "to some discreet and "learned minister of God's word, and "open their grief, that they might receive the benefit of absolution, together with ghostly counsel and advice."

THE wisdom and goodness of God are seen in his manner of proportioning his aids to the exigencies of his people, and raising up reformers, when religion most needs their help, to revive the true spirit of it among men. If we view the state of things in *Judea* at two different periods, we shall soon perceive how seasonably *Elijah* was sent at one time, and *John the Baptist*, that second *Elijah*, at another. Each was an aera of distinguished corruption, but corruption of a different species. During the former, idolatry was the fashionable error, which had found it's way into the court,

court, and overspread the face of the church. The characteristics of the latter were, on the one hand, a pharisaical hypocrisy, a boast of moral rectitude, which existed only in theory, and a vain confidence in a law which nobody observed; on the other, a Sadducean infidelity, opposed to the national faith and hope, denying a resurrection, and future state of retribution. *Elijah* reclaimed the people from the worship of Baal to that of the true God; *John* called his hearers from unbelief, hypocrisy, and vice, to faith and holiness.

AN ambassador of heaven, sent to preach truth to those who are captivated by error, and righteousness to those who are enamoured of sin, will never proceed far in the discharge of his trust, unless he be endued with a fervent zeal for the cause and the honour of him that sent him. Every holy person is not blessed with a spirit, any more than he is invested with a commission, to appear in a public capacity, to reprove rulers and kings, to look an angry world in the face, and overcome all the opposition it can raise against him. Zeal, with-

SECT. V. without holiness to support it, like a meteor, will blaze and expire. Zeal, without knowlege to limit and direct it, will waste and destroy, like the element from the effect of which it takes it's name, when that has burst it's bounds, and rules where it ought to be in subjection. But when knowlege and holiness are first obtained, it is zeal which must quicken and diffuse them, as the sun doth light and heat, for the benefit of the universe. "Then stood up Elias the prophet as fire," saith the son of Sirach, "and his word burnt like a lamp<sup>a</sup>." And our Lord, speaking of the Baptist, gives this account of him, "He was a burning and a shining light<sup>b</sup>." His zeal was tempered with knowlege, for it gave light; and his knowlege was actuated by zeal, for it was burning as well as shining. His sermons came warm from the heart of the speaker, and therefore found their way to that of the hearer, which was inflamed by them with the love, as

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. xlviii. 1.

<sup>b</sup> John v. 35.



his understanding was enlightened with the knowledge of heavenly things. SECT. V.

LET us view and compare together the zeal of *Elijah*, exerted before idolatrous *Israel* assembled at mount *Carmel*, and that displayed by St. *John*, when he saw the Pharisees and Sadducees come to his baptism.

FOR the sins of the people, and the iniquities of the prince, in the days of *Elijah*<sup>a</sup>, heaven was closed over their heads, the blessings of rain and dew were withheld till the divine author of them should be again acknowledged, and famine stalked through the land, preaching repentance as she went. *Israel* felt the wound, but owned not the hand that inflicted it. The Almighty had constituted the prophet his vicegerent, and enjoined the elements to second him in the work of reformation. *Ahab* and his subjects, instead of consulting *Elijah* about the removal of their calamities, regarded him as the occasion of them, and the sole “troubler of *Israel*.” At the command of God, he presents himself before the king, and tells him

<sup>a</sup> See 1 Kings xvii, & xviii.

plainly

## SECT. V.

plainly, "Thou art the man." *Israel* is convened at mount *Carmel*, and reproved.

"Why halt ye between two opinions?"

"If *Jehovah* be God, follow him. But

"if *Baal*, then follow him." The false

prophets appear on the side of *Baal* and

his kindred idols, to the number of nine

hundred and fifty: on the side of the

true God, *Elijah* stands single. The

trial is made, and the grand question

determined by a visible token of the di-

vine presence. The nation returns to

it's duty, idolatry is punished in it's vo-

taries, the heaven gives rain, and the

earth brings forth her increase.

ON the banks of *Jordan* we behold,

in the person of *St. John*, another

*Elijah*, reproving the people of *Israel*,

again departed from the Lord their

God, while some, as the Pharisees, were

hypocrites, and others, as the Saddu-

cees, were unbelievers. Equally a

stranger to fear and partiality, and en-

dued with a prophetic power of dis-

cerning that serpentine subtlety and ma-

lignity which lurked under a specious

outside, he rebukes them sharply, if by

\* See Matt. iii. 7, &c.

any means he might convince them of SECT. V.  
 sin, and lead them to true repentance.

“ O generation of vipers, who hath  
 “ warned you to flee from the wrath to  
 “ come ? ” You, who seem to have  
 taken possession of the inheritance, as  
 if Messiah would never appear to claim  
 it ; you, who trust in yourselves that  
 you are righteous, and despise others ;  
 come you to me, to be baptized with  
 publicans and sinners ! What can be  
 the reason of all this ? What can be  
 your motive ? The business in hand is  
 not one to be trifled with. Hypocrisy  
 has no place here ; nor will the exter-  
 nal shew, without the internal work,  
 in this case, avail to any thing, but  
 condemnation. “ Bring forth therefore  
 “ fruits meet for repentance ; ” be not  
 barren, but “ bring forth ; ” bring forth  
 not leaves only, or fair professions, pro-  
 mises, and designs, but “ fruits,” or  
 good deeds ; and such as may be “ wor-  
 “ thy ” of the tree on which they grow ;  
 such as may advance to maturity, and  
 ripen into holiness. “ And think not  
 “ to say within yourselves, We have  
 “ Abraham to our father : ” many will

M

here-

SECT. V. hereafter say that, to little purpose. A  
 ~~~~~ descent from the loins of *Abraham* will  
 profit none, but those who are like *A-*  
*braham*. His true children are reckoned  
 by faith, not consanguinity. Imagine  
 not that the favour of heaven is heredi-  
 tary and indefeasible in the line of *Abra-*  
*ham* according to the flesh, or that the  
 divine promises must fail, if not made  
 good to you; "for I say unto you, that  
 "God is able of these stones to raise up  
 "children unto *Abraham*;" by the  
 power of his grace he can make con-  
 verts of nations at present utterly bar-  
 ren, unfruitful, obdurate, who shall in-  
 herit the blessings which you reject. Nor  
 let the consideration, that *Messiah* has  
 so long delayed his coming, induce you  
 to be careless and negligent. "for now  
 is the axe laid to the root of the tree;"  
 believe me, he is at hand; your trial  
 will soon be over, and your fate deter-  
 mined; the decisive and irremediable  
 stroke will be struck; if not prevented  
 by a timely repentance, a speedy and  
 real change of heart and manners;  
 "every tree which bringeth not forth  
 "good fruit shall be cut down and cast  
 "into



“into the fire.” Hitherto God hath SECT. V.  
 born with your errors and iniquities, but he will do so no longer. The law  
 hath been given, and the prophets have  
 been sent; but they are not regarded;  
 and therefore he is coming, after whom  
 no other messenger is to be expected  
 from above. He will be the Saviour of  
 all, who, from a sense of their sins,  
 shall be ready to embrace him as such.  
 I am not that person, but the least and  
 lowest of his servants, sent before to  
 give notice of his approach, and pre-  
 pare you to receive him. “I indeed  
 baptize you with water unto repent-  
 ance;” but it is he who must grant  
 remission of sins repented of. “he that  
 cometh after me is mightier than I,  
 whose shoes I am not worthy to bear;”  
 he brings with him almighty power  
 from on high, to pardon sins, and con-  
 fer grace; “he shall baptize you with  
 the Holy Ghost and with fire,” to  
 sanctify your natures, to purify, en-  
 lighten, and inflame your hearts with  
 the desire and love of celestial objects.  
 At his appearance, he will try and make  
 manifest the tempers and dispositions of  
 M 2 men.

SECT. V. men. Deceit and hypocrisy shall not stand before him. "His fan is in his hand, and he will thoroughly purge his floor," sifting and winnowing that which is good from that which seems to be so; "and he will gather his wheat into his garner," translate to heaven all that is pure, substantial, and fruitful; "but he will burn up the chaff," whatsoever is fallacious, light, empty, and barren, "with unquenchable fire," in hell.

SUCH a discourse from such a person occasioned great searchings in the hearts of the people. They found all the vain opinions and presumptions, on which they had been accustomed to rely, suddenly taken from them, and nothing left, but to put themselves forthwith under the direction of so holy and heavenly a preacher. With fear and trembling they applied to him, as the affrighted gaoler afterwards did to Paul and Silas, saying, "What shall we do then?" And when a penitent will ask advice of his spiritual guide, with a determined resolution to follow it, he

Luke iii. 10, &c.

is not far from the kingdom of God. SECT. V.  
 He is sensible of his disease; and that, in the maladies of the mind, is half the cure. St. John, in his answer, enjoins not legal, but evangelical sacrifices, exhorting his converts to shew the sincerity of their conversion by loving their neighbours, and relieving their necessities, as God had loved and relieved them. "He that hath two coats, let him impart to him that hath none; and he that hath meat let him do likewise." These works of feeding and clothing the poor, including all other acts of mercy under them, are mentioned, as being the most necessary and indispensable; and he, says a pious writer upon this passage, who is not moved with his brother's misery, deserves to find God unmoved with his own.  
 AMONG others that came to be baptized, were some *publicans*, or tax-gatherers; a set of men, whose employment rendered them odious, as it often tempted them to court the favour of those who employed them, or to gratify their own avarice, by fleecing the people.

Sect. V. people. These also were importunate  
 with St. John, saying, "And what shall  
 we do? And he said unto them,  
 "Exact no more than that which is  
 appointed you." The reflections of  
 the writer above-cited, upon this case  
 of the publicans, and the following one  
 of the *soldiers*, are so extremely sen-  
 sible, judicious, and pertinent, that the  
 reader will have an obligation to me,  
 for presenting him with them, nearly  
 as I find them. "A wise preacher, like  
 St. John, should distinguish the abuses  
 of any state or condition of life from  
 the condition itself; he should be so far  
 from disturbing either the peace of pri-  
 vate consciences, or the public repose,  
 by condemning necessary employments,  
 that he ought carefully to promote both,  
 by contenting himself with only re-  
 trenching the disorders and injustice  
 of those who exercise them. To be  
 exact in not permitting any abuses in  
 employments of this nature, is to serve  
 the state: and those loose casuists, who  
 allow and authorize them, are permi-  
 cious to governments, by rendering  
 these employments odious to the people,  
 by



by favouring their murmurings, by encouraging acts of injustice, and thereby giving occasion to rebellion and revolt.

“ And the soldiers demanded of him, saying, And what shall we do? And he said unto them, Do violence to no man, neither accuse any falsely, and be content with your wages.” St. John here, in the last place, regulates the duties of military persons, and shews, that no condition is excluded from salvation. The business of war is not in itself at all opposite thereto; since there have been not only christian *soldiers*, but even great saints and generous martyrs of that profession. If all war was contrary to the gospel, St. John would not have allowed those who presented themselves before him to continue in that state. However it is certainly full of obstacles to salvation, which very few surmount. A state, which is generally embraced either out of passion, or libertinism, or through a blind destination of birth, the exercises whereof are so violent and tumultuous, agrees but little with the exercises of christianity, or the spirit of the gospel, which is all peace,

SECT. V. *peace, charity, and meekness.* It is notwithstanding just and necessary, that there should be men to defend the state; but it is still more just and necessary, that this should not be done at the expence of salvation. The grace of God can do every thing: this is what ought to comfort those who intend to serve *him* in serving their king and country.<sup>a</sup>

ONE cannot but observe the general agreement and harmony which seem to have prevailed, at this time among men otherwise of tempers and dispositions very different from, and opposite to each other. Jews and Gentiles, Pharisees and Publicans, Sadducees and Soldiers, all confess their sins, and participate of the same baptism, all struck with apprehensions of some impending evil, all flying from the wrath to come, forgetting their mutual hostilities and antipathies, and, like the creatures in the days of *Noah*, taking refuge together in the ark. As if the prophecy of *Isaiah* had now begun to receive it's accomplishment, the publicans, who, before the preaching of *John*, were ravenous as evening "wolves," became as in-

nocent

<sup>a</sup> *Quesnel in Loc.*

innocent as the "lamb," The soldiers, SECT. V.  
 who had been formerly fierce and cruel  
 as the "lion," became tame and tract-  
 able as the "ox," and submitted their  
 necks to the yoke of the gospel. Such  
 of the Pharisees likewise, who, before  
 their baptism, had been venomous as the  
 "asp," or "cockatrice," did, by the  
 worthy receiving of this baptism, and  
 the grace which God gave them, be-  
 come mild and gentle as the "sucking  
 infant," or "weaned child".

THE concord thus produced in Ju-  
 dea by the sermons of St. John, and  
 the tranquillity which the whole earth  
 then enjoyed, sitting quiet as it were in  
 expectation of her Lord, betokened the  
 manifestation of the Prince of peace.  
 "Then cometh Jesus from Galilee to  
 "Jordan to John, to be baptized of  
 "him". After thirty years past in re-  
 tirement at Nazareth, the blessed Jesus  
 was now to break forth, like the sun  
 from a cloud, or a stream from the  
 bowels of the earth, to enlighten man-

<sup>a</sup> See the Works of Dr Thomas Jackson, ii. 522.

<sup>b</sup> Matt. iii. 13, &c.

SECT. V. kind by his doctrine, and refresh them with the influences of his grace. The mighty concourse of all ranks and degrees of people attending St. John at the river Jordan, rendered that the fittest place where he might first shew himself to the world. He who knew no sin, but was to take away the sins of all other men, presented himself in the crowd of sinners, as one of them, and solicited "the baptism of repentance," not that water might sanctify him, but that he might "sanctify water to the mystical washing away of sin."

CONFOUNDED at the thought of the Master being baptized by the servant, St. John at first "forbad him, saying, I have need to be baptized of thee, and comest thou to me? And Jesus answering said unto him, Suffer it to be so now, for thus it becometh us to fulfil all righteousness. Then he suffered him." Jesus Christ, as condescending to stand charged with our sins, and, to that end, being "made under the law," was to fulfil the "righteousness" of the law, as it con-

<sup>a</sup> Gal. iv. 4.

fitted



sisted in an obedience to ceremonial rites, as well as moral precepts. In the character and capacity of our substitute, he underwent circumcision, although he had no sin of his own to be cut off; and received baptism, although he had no pollution of his own to be washed away. What Christian can slight the ordinances of the church, when he sees the Redeemer, for his sake, submitting to observe them all?

No sooner was Jesus baptized, but he "came up straightway" out of the river, like another *Josbua*, leading his people, through the waters of *Jordan*, to the land of promise. And as he was "praying," doubtless for success in the great work he had undertaken, "Lo, the heavens were opened, and the Spirit of God," encompassed, we may presume, with a blaze of glory, "descended in a bodily shape like a dove," speaking better things than that of *Noah*. In this form, emblematical of innocence and purity, it "lighted," settled, and abode upon him, the Father thus consecrating him to his office, by "anointing him with the Holy Ghost

SECT. V. “and with power<sup>a</sup>,” as the legal ministers were anointed with oil. And that no doubt might remain, the appearance was farther explained by “a voice from heaven, saying, “This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased.” Such are the blessings which, in effect, do always attend the divine sacraments, when duly administered, with prayer. For then the heavens are opened, and the Spirit is given, to conform us to the image of a meek and holy Saviour, and, through him, to make us acceptable in the sight of God.

<sup>a</sup> Acts x. 38.

SECT.

SECTION VI.

*Considerations on the testimony born by St. John, at different times, to the Messiahship of Jesus.*

**W**HEN a servant of God, through SECT. VI.  
the power of divine grace, hath made some proficiency in holiness, and seeth the world and the flesh under his feet, it is not uncommon for his third grand enemy, the devil, to set upon him, and prevail over him, by puffing him up with a conceit of his own excellency, and so rendering his very attainments an occasion of his falling. The hurt which a man receives, in such a case, is proportionable to the height from which he falls; as hell was first prepared for the tempter himself, because he fell from heaven.

IT is not, therefore, the least conspicuous part of St. John's character, that a sanctity so extraordinary was not in him accompanied with any degree of pride,

**SECT. VI.** pride, a worm which often cankers the fairest fruits that grow in the garden of God. He heard his own praise echoed from every quarter, and "all men," struck with admiration at what was about to happen, "mused in their hearts concerning him, whether he was the Christ." Nay, the Sanhedrim, that they might be resolved in so important a point, sent a formal deputation of "priests and Levites from Jerusalem, to enquire of him, Who art thou?" As the Baptist was, at that time, in high repute among his countrymen, and as secular designs are sometimes covered with spiritual pretences, it is not impossible, but that they might hope to flatter him into an acknowledgment of his being "some great one," and to frame of him a Messiah adapted to their purposes. But John was neither ambitious of an honour which did not belong to him, nor ashamed of a Master, who was about to appear in the form of a servant. He took no glory to himself, but remitted it all where he

<sup>a</sup> Luke iii. 15.

<sup>b</sup> John i. 19, &c.



knew it to be due. "He confessed, and SECT. VI.  
 "denied not, but confessed, I am not  
 "the Christ. And they asked him,  
 "What then? Art thou Elias," that is,  
*Elijah the Tishbite*, whom they expected  
 to descend from heaven? "And he  
 "saith, I am not. Art thou *ο ωφθαλμος*,  
 "the prophet," meaning probably "Je-  
 "remias, or one of the prophets,"  
 whom, as it appears by Matt. xvi. 14.  
 the Jews looked for to arise from the  
 dead. "And he answered, No."

To all these enquiries, made by the  
 priests and Levites deputed from the  
 Sanhedrim, St. *John* returned answers  
 which were true, but concise as pos-  
 sible, that they might take no advan-  
 tage of his words, being aware that  
 they grew envious of his fame, jealous  
 for their own authority, and fearful of  
 a Messiah, who would not answer their  
 hopes, by gratifying their avarice and  
 ambition. "Then said they to him,  
 "Who art thou, that we may give an  
 "answer to them that sent us? What  
 "sayest thou of thyself? He said, I am  
 "the voice of one crying in the wilder-  
 "ness, Make straight the way of the  
 "Lord,

SECT. VI. "Lord, as said the prophet Esaias."

~ This was informing them plainly enough, that the prophecies were soon to be accomplished by the manifestation of Messiah, and that repentance, according to his doctrine and baptism, was the only preparation fit and necessary to be made, for the reception of their King.

"They who were sent were of the "Pharisees," and consequently could not relish tidings which put an end to all their schemes of temporal dominion, and earthly grandeur, inculcating, instead of them, the duties of mortification and self-denial. This was not *their* system; and many, in every age since, have been of the same opinion, not caring to receive Christ, unless he came to them with the world in his hand. Finding, therefore, that *John* had no vanity to be worked upon, they had recourse to other measures, and began to dispute his commission to baptize; "They asked him, and said unto him, "Why baptizest thou then, if thou be "not that Christ, nor Elias, neither "that prophet?"

St.

St. *John's* reply shews his own hu-<sup>SECT. VI.</sup> mility, and, at the same time, bears testimony to the dignity of Jesus. "I indeed baptize you with water;" my baptism, like my preaching, is preparatory only, leading to another baptism of the Spirit, which shall cleanse the souls of penitents from every thing that defileth, through faith in Messiah and his heavenly doctrine. And this Messiah is not afar off, as you may imagine him to be; "there standeth one among you, whom ye know not;" he appears like other men, lowly, unattended, undistinguished; he doth not, as yet, think proper to manifest his power and glory; but hereafter you will find him to be far other than he seems. As to myself, of whom some are pleased to entertain an high opinion, I am nothing: "This is he, who, coming after me, is preferred before me," as much as the greatest master is before the meanest of his servants, deemed unworthy to perform the least office about his person; "the latchet of whose shoes I am not worthy to unloose." This testimony did St. *John* give to the Saviour of the

O

world,

SECT. VI. world, in the audience of the priests, and Levites, and the people, “at Bethabara beyond Jordan, where he was baptizing.” Intent upon humbling himself, that his great Lord and Master might be exalted, he declared himself a messenger only, sent to prepare his ways; and every thing in him, and about him, spoke the same language.

“THE next day,” an opportunity offered itself of pointing out the person of Jesus to the people; “John seeth Jesus coming unto him,” probably, to acknowledge him as his friend, relation, and precursor; “and saith, Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world:” Behold that blessed person prefigured in the law, and foretold by the prophets; one that is all meekness and innocence, patience and resignation, without offence in his mouth, without guile or malice in his heart, without spot or blemish in soul or body; the Lamb which *Abraham* told his son *Isaac*, that God would in time provide; the Lamb, by the sprinkling of whose blood, true *Israelites* are preserved from the destroyer; the sacrifice



crifice on which are laid the iniquities SECT. VI.  
of us all; the Saviour who, by expia-  
ting, taketh away the sin of the world,  
and conferreth righteousness on them  
that will believe in him, and accept it  
from him, being conformed to his ex-  
ample of meekness and lowliness. This,  
O all ye that behold him, "this is he  
"of whom I said, after me cometh  
"a man which is preferred before me,  
"for he was," he existed, ages "before  
"me," even from the beginning; he is  
fairer than the children of men, full of  
grace and truth, of divine glory, and  
celestial beauty.

To guard against any suspicion of  
collusion<sup>3</sup> between two persons, who,  
as relations, might be supposed to act in  
concert, and favour each other's pre-  
tensions, St. *John* adds, "And I knew  
"him not, but he that sent me to bap-  
"tize with water, the same said unto  
"me, Upon whom thou shalt see the  
" Spirit descending and remaining on

<sup>3</sup> See the impossibility of any such collusion fully  
demonstrated by the Reverend Mr. *Bell*, in his exact  
and elaborate *Enquiry into the Divine Missions of John*  
*the Baptist and Jesus Christ.*

SECT. VI. “him, the same is he which baptizeth  
 “with the Holy Ghost.”

FROM this passage we learn, that the visible descent of the Spirit was the sign given to St. *John*, whereby he was to know the Messiah. Jesus was brought up at *Nazareth*; and St. *John* was educated in the desarts; and it seems to have been so ordered by Providence, that no interview had passed between them, after they had arrived to years of maturity. When Jesus, therefore, came to be baptized, St. *John* had no knowledge of his person. But, probably, on making the enquiries, usual at baptism, into his profession, name, and place of abode, and finding likewise, that he had no sins to confess<sup>a</sup>, as all others had, he saw reason sufficient to conclude, that this was the Christ; which might occasion his apology, “I have need to be baptized of thee,” &c. And then, when Jesus came up out of the water, the Spirit descended, and put the matter beyond all doubt. “I saw, and bare

<sup>a</sup> See *Annotations on St. John's Gospel*, by the Rev. Mr. Merrick, Part II. p. 50. and the Works of Dr. Jackson, by him referred to, Vol. II. p. 518.

“record,

“record, that this is the Son of God.” SECT. VI.

So little account did these two wonderful personages make of their relation according to the flesh. From their infancy they had not conversed together; and when they met, it was in public, that *John* might bear his testimony; soon after which, he was cast into prison, and saw Jesus no more. An higher, more important, and durable connection, than any formed by consanguinity, engaged his attention, as it should do that of all Christ's disciples, according to those deep and divine strains of *St. Paul*; “The love of Christ constraineth us, because we thus judge, that if one died for all, then were all dead; and that he died for all, that they which live should not henceforth live unto themselves, but unto him which died for them, and rose again. Wherefore henceforth know we no man after the flesh, yea, though we have known Christ after the flesh, yet now henceforth know we him no more. Therefore if any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things

SECT. VI. "things are past away; behold, all  
 ~~~~~ "things are become new".

THE Baptist, having now lived to see the Lord's Christ, and shew him to the world, was ready, like old *Simeon*, to depart in peace, and to make over his disciples to a better Master, who would never leave them, nor forsake them. "Again, the next day after, "John stood, and two of his disciples; "and looking upon Jesus as he walked, "he saith, Behold the Lamb of God." Happy the Christian minister, who, like *St. John*, lives only to point out the Saviour to his people. And happy the people, who, like the two disciples, thereupon follow Jesus, enquire where he dwelleth, enter in, and abide with him.

To one of *St. John's* disposition it could not but be matter of concern to find envy and jealousy stirring in the breasts of his disciples, on account of the increasing fame of Jesus, as being likely to eclipse that of their master. For on occasion of a dispute which had happened about purification by baptism

<sup>a</sup> 2 Cor. v. 14.

(disputes



(disputes being seldom managed so as SECT. VI. not to produce ill-will) “they came  
 “unto John, and said unto him, Rabbi,  
 “he that was with thee beyond Jordan,  
 “to whom thou bearest witness, be-  
 “hold, the same baptizeth, and all  
 “men come unto him<sup>a</sup>,” intimating,  
 that *John* was in danger of losing both  
 his credit and his disciples, by means  
 of one, whom they took for a disciple,  
 like themselves, as he had been bapti-  
 zed by the same master. So ready are  
 men, at every turn, to form parties in  
 religion, and to set up their respective  
 teachers in opposition to each other;  
 the consequences of which are, that  
 the hearers waste that time in wrang-  
 ling about a duty, which should be  
 spent in practising it; and the teachers,  
 if they have not good hearts and steady  
 heads, preach themselves, instead of  
 preaching Jesus Christ. “All men come  
 “to him!” Great hath been the power  
 of this argument to kindle the flames of  
 emulation and dissention in the church;  
 and the disciples of *John* did not doubt  
 but that the consideration would excite

<sup>a</sup> John iii. 26, &c.

SECT. VI. in him those passions, which they felt working within themselves.

BUT he was not framed of materials liable to take fire from such a spark. On the contrary, a perusal of the discourse which this address procured from him, is enough at any time to extinguish it, where it may have fallen. He made use of the incident, to bear his last and most noble testimony to the power and majesty of his Lord. So far was he from being offended, or chagrined, because all men resorted to Jesus, that he triumphed in it, as his glory and his joy, as the very end for which he was sent into the world, to preach and to baptize. As if he had said ---

WHY are ye jealous, and why do envious thoughts arise in your hearts? Look not to me, or to any thing that is in me, but to God, who made me what I am, placed me in the station, and called me to the office designed for me; "a man can receive," or take to himself, "nothing, except it be given him "from above." And ye know the character in which I have ever acted; "Ye "yourselves bear me witness, that I  
" said,

“said, I am not the Christ, but that I SECT. VI.  
 “am sent before him,” as his messenger  
 and minister, not to assemble disciples  
 in mine own name, but to prepare men  
 for him, and direct men to him. If  
 therefore ye set so much by my autho-  
 rity, why do ye not credit my testimo-  
 ny? To Messiah, not to me, the church  
 is to be gathered and united; and “he  
 “that hath the bride is the bridegroom:  
 “but the friend of the bridegroom,”  
 who hath been honoured with a share  
 in bringing about so happy an event,  
 and who, when it is brought about,  
 “standeth and heareth him” conversing  
 with his spouse, cannot therefore be  
 grieved and vexed; he cannot envy the  
 felicity of the bridegroom, or desire to  
 take the bride from him; but most as-  
 suredly congratulates with him, and  
 “rejoiceth greatly because of the bride-  
 “groom’s voice,” finding that he hath  
 so well succeeded in the work in which  
 he was employed. This is my very case,  
 when you come and tell me, that all  
 men resort to the person, of whom I  
 have so often testified, that he is the  
 Christ; “this my joy therefore is ful-  
 P “filled.”

SECT. VI. "filled." I have no greater pleasure than to hear, that disciples go from me to him. As the morning star, I only shone to proclaim the approach of the sun. Now he is risen, I go down; "he must increase, but I must decrease;" he will shine more and more unto the perfect day, while I shall set, and disappear. And reason good why it should be so. That which is preparatory must give place to that which is perfective; a baptism of water must yield to a baptism of fire; an human instructor must cede to one that is divine. "He that is of the earth is earthly, and speaketh of the earth;" in spite of his best endeavours, he will savour of his original, and there will be an alloy of dust and ashes in all he saith; whereas "he that cometh from heaven," I mean the blessed person of whom ye are so jealous, "is above all" the children of Adam. When this sun shineth in his strength, every star is obscured, and the world will perceive the difference between the discourses of the Master and those of the servant, as readily as it distinguisheth the glories of the day from the



the pale lustre and faint glimmering of SECT. VI.  
those orbs, which serve in some mea-  
sure to dispel the darkness of the night.  
According to the grace given unto me,  
I have declared the kingdom of heaven  
to be at hand; but when Messiah speaks  
of that kingdom, he speaks from his  
own knowlege; "what he hath seen  
"and heard, that he testifieth;" and  
yet, though I have said so much of him,  
and so many go to hear him, "no man  
"receiveth his testimony," as he ought  
to do. Think not this a slight matter,  
for no one can disbelieve him, without  
giving God the lie; "he that hath re-  
"ceived his testimony, hath set to his  
"seal, that God is true," by allowing  
the credentials of his Son, and acknow-  
ledging in him the accomplishment of  
what was foretold by the law, by the  
prophets, and by myself. "For he,"  
the Messiah, "whom God hath sent,  
"speaketh the words of God," and  
that in a different sense from all others,  
who, from time to time, have been  
endued with such a portion of the di-  
vine influence as was meet for them;  
but "God giveth not the Spirit by

SECT. VI. *measure unto him,"* having decreed,  
 that in him should all fulness dwell.

"For the Father loveth the Son," not as he loveth any of his faithful servants, but so as that "he hath put all things "into his hand," dispensing glory, honour, and immortality to mankind, through him alone. Be no longer envious and jealous, then, of his greatness, which is your salvation. If you

would honour me, and at the same time serve your own eternal interest, receive, in few words, the sum and substance of this my last testimony ---- "He "that believeth on the Son, hath everlasting life: and he that believeth "not the Son, shall not see life; but "the wrath of God abideth on him."

By this part of St. *John's* character and conduct, in how pleasing a manner are the ministers of Christ instructed, that they are to bear testimony to him, not to themselves; to seek his glory, not their own; that they should take pleasure in the success of their brethren's labours, by which the cause of their common Master is promoted; that

the rising lights of the church should do honour to those who have gone before them, and the setting ones rejoice to be outshone by those who are coming after them; that envy and jealousy, in short, ought to have no place among the disciples of the Lamb of God, on whom descended and abode the celestial Dove,

ness, which is your salvation. If you

would honour me, and at the same time

leave your own eternal interest

in few words, the fun and jubilation

of this my last testimony from Ho

right-believeth on the Son, hath ever-

lasting life and be believed.

“not the Son, shall not be like, but

the wrath of God against him."

B. 7. This part of the John's character.

and control, in how planning a number

Abundant find, to indicate, etc. 91.

that they are to bear testimony to him

not a humblest to seek his glory

not their own - that they should take

plunged in the face of their breath-

ren's labours, by which the household

S E C -

## SECTION VII.

*Considerations on the imprisonment of St.**John, the message sent by him to Christ, and the answer returned to it.*

Sect. VII.

**A**DMIRABLE is the advice of the son of *Sirach* to every one who is about to stand forth in the cause of true religion. "My son, if thou come  
 " to serve the Lord, prepare thy soul  
 " for temptation. Set thy heart aright,  
 " and constantly endure, and make not  
 " haste in time of trouble. Whatsoever  
 " ever is brought upon thee take cheer-  
 " fully, and be patient when thou art  
 " changed to a low estate. For gold is  
 " tried in the fire, and acceptable men  
 " in the furnace of adversity<sup>a</sup>." The reformer will proceed but a little way in his work, whose zeal is not backed with fortitude. The apprehension of danger, or even the frown of power,

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. ii. 1.

will



will alter his sentiments; he will see <sup>See A.VII.</sup> things in a different point of view, and turn with every blast of fashion or interest, till he himself believes every thing, and his hearers, offended and confounded, believe nothing.

Not so the Baptist. "What went ye out into the wilderness to see? A reed shaken with the wind?" No: a column firm and immoveable, against which winds might blow, and waves beat, in vain; one who had fixed his principles, and considered well, before he entered upon action; one who began not to build, till he had first counted the costs; but who, when once he did begin, would be sure to finish.

A PERSON unacquainted with the world, and the tempers of it's children, might, perhaps, be surprized upon hearing, that a prophet, like St. John, who spent his time in calling his fellow creatures to happiness and salvation, and who coveted no man's gold, or silver, or apparel, was cast into prison. But, as the wise man observeth, "The thing which hath been is that which shall

\* Matt. xi. 7.

" be,

will

Sect. VII. “be, and there is nothing new under  
 “the sun.” *Abah*, at the instigation  
 of *Jezebel*, again thirsts after the blood  
 of *Elijah*.

HEROD, the tetrarch of *Galilee*, had  
 put away his own wife, the daughter  
 of *Aretas*, and had married *Herodias*,  
 the wife of his brother *Philip*, whom,  
 contrary to the laws of hospitality as  
 well as religion, he had seduced, while  
 a guest in her husband's house<sup>b</sup>. The  
 sanctity and integrity of the Baptist had  
 begotten, even in *Herod*, a great veneration  
 and reverence for his character.  
 “Herod feared John, knowing that he  
 “was a just man, and an holy, and ob-  
 “served him, and when he heard him,  
 “he did many things, and heard him  
 “gladly<sup>c</sup>.” But the matter of *Herodias*  
 was a tender point, on which the te-  
 trarch was not disposed to hear the law,  
 because he was not disposed to do it.  
 He was determined to persevere in what  
 was wrong, and his monitor to persist  
 in telling him of it, without reserve.

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. i. 9.

<sup>b</sup> See *Josephus* — Antiq. Lib. xviii. Cap. 6.

<sup>c</sup> Mark vi. 20.

“ John

“John said unto him, It is not lawful Sect. VII.  
“for thee to have thy brother’s wife.”

*John*, who had overcome the world, could not, either by promises or threatenings, be induced to recede from his duty, through hope of temporal good, or fear of temporal evil. He was therefore soon convinced, by being carried to prison, that *Herod* had no farther occasion for his service. And who doth not rather wish to have been imprisoned with him, than to have glittered in all the glories of the throne of *Herod*? Happy *John*, sequestered once more from a troublesome world, to converse with God, and to meditate on that blessed place, and that blessed company, to which he was now hastening!

In this situation we find the thoughts of the Baptist employed not upon his own sufferings, but upon the interests of his great Master, the fame of whose miracles had reached the prison, and sounded in his ears. “When John had “heard in prison the works of Jesus, “he sent two of his disciples” ---” Thus the afflictions and tribulations

<sup>a</sup> Matt. xi. 2, &c.

Q

which

se a. VII. which a Christian must endure for a little season, in the world, should serve only to quicken his desires after his Redeemer, of whose works, wrought in mercy for the children of men, he will often hear; and the contemplation of them should afford him continual delight in the time of his captivity, until the day of his enlargement shall come. With *Paul* and *Silas* let him declare the glad tidings of salvation, and sing the praises of God in the prison-house. Let him enquire diligently, and take every opportunity of hearing more particulars concerning his Saviour, as also of placing others in the way of information. So will he copy the example of him, who, "when he heard in prison the works of Jesus, sent two of his disciples," that they might be more fully instructed, as to his person and mission.

For that this must have been St. *John's* intention in sending them, is plain from the question which they were enjoined to ask; "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?" The Baptist could not propose



pose this question for his own information, but evidently for that of his disciples, whose prejudices in favour of himself, their first master, he found it so difficult to conquer. What he had hitherto said having proved insufficient for that purpose, he now, in compassion to their infirmity, condescendeth to have their scruples propounded in his own name; affording us thereby a very useful hint, that in order to instruct others, we should abase ourselves, and know how to become weak with those who are so. For it often happens, that men need information upon some important point, who either thro' pride or bashfulness will not ask it, or through passion and prejudice will not receive it at our hands. In this case, the good, which we cannot do directly, we must contrive, if we can, to do indirectly, by proposing those questions ourselves, which we know that others in company want to hear answered, but cannot bring themselves to ask. This method of edifying the weak, without exposing their infirmities, will produce in them that love and confidence to-

Sect. VII. wards us, which, for their own sakes, we wish them to have. Whereas a contrary conduct, by provoking and alienating their affections from us, may put it out of our power ever to be of service to them again.

THE same charitable plan is carried on by our Lord, who, in his answer, instructs the disciples, by seeming to instruct their master; "Go (saith he) and tell *John* what ye have seen and heard." And this may suggest a reason, why Christians in general should converse more upon religious subjects, than they are wont to do, both asking questions, like *St. John*, and returning answers, like *Christ*, for the benefit and improvement of the by-standers, who may need information, through the person to whom one immediately addresseth oneself, should not. And many a man hath been the better, all his life after, for a seasonable word spoken in common conversation, which is often more regarded and attended to, than a formal discourse from the pulpit.

THE

THE best proofs of a divine mission, Sect. VII.  
 which man is capable of receiving, are  
 miracles, evidently and incontestably  
 such; miracles, of the reality of which  
 the outward senses, the eyes and the  
 ears, are competent judges; miracles  
 wrought publicly in the face of the  
 world, in the presence of enemies as  
 well as friends; and that, not once, or  
 twice, but repeatedly; and these mi-  
 racles expressly predicted, hundreds of  
 years beforehand. Such were the proofs  
 offered by Christ to the disciples of  
*John*. For “in that same hour,” while  
 they were present, and before their eyes,  
 “he cured many of their infirmities and  
 “plagues, and of evil spirits, and unto  
 “many that were blind he gave sight.  
 “Then said he unto them, Go your  
 “way, and tell John what things ye  
 “have seen and heard; how that the  
 “blind see, the lame walk, the lepers  
 “are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead  
 “are raised, to the poor the gospel is  
 “preached. And blessed is he whoso-  
 “ever shall not be offended in me.” As  
 if he had said; I bear not witness of  
 myself; my miracles bear witness of me.

Only

*Sec. VII.* Only tell *John* what you have heard and seen, and he will teach you how to draw the proper inference. *Isaiab*, as he well knoweth, did foretell, that when *Messiah* came, he would perform such and such mighty works. You yourselves are eye and ear witnesses of the works done by me. Lay the premises fairly together, and you cannot be to seek for the conclusion.

*JOHN* had engaged his reputation as a prophet, that *Jesus of Nazareth*, whom he baptized in *Jordan*, would answer the character of *Messiah*, and do the works predicted of him; as appears from *John* x. 39. where we read, that *Jesus*, having escaped from the *Jews*, “went again beyond *Jordan*, “unto the place where *John* at first “baptized; and there he abode. And “many resorted unto him, and said, “*John* did no miracle: but all things “that *John* spake of this man were “true. And many believed on him “there.” Malice itself cannot find reason to suspect a collusion, when prophecies and miracles thus unite their testi-



testimony, and proclaim Jesus to be the Sect. VII.  
Messiah.

AT his word, "the eyes of the blind  
"were opened, and the ears of the deaf  
"unstopped; the lame man leaped as  
"an hart, and the tongue of the dumb  
"did sing;" the leprosy, that foul,  
contagious, and obstinate disease, for  
which so many ceremonies of purifica-  
tion were appointed by the law, was  
healed at once; and the dead in their  
graves, hearing the voice of the son of  
man, came forth. Every malady and  
infirmity, to which the children of  
*Adam* were subject, vanished at his pre-  
sence, and confessed the almighty deli-  
verer of his people. This, therefore,  
is "He that should come," nor let us  
think of "looking for another," to  
open the eyes of the understanding, and  
let in the light of heavenly knowlege  
upon ignorant and benighted minds;  
to remove all obstructions, formed by  
interest, prejudice, or passion, and give  
us the hearing ear; to restore and invi-  
gorate the will and affections, that we  
may make large advances in the course

*Isai. xxxv. 5, 6.*

of

Sect. VII. of duty, and run with delight the way

of God's commandments; to loose the  
tongues which guilt hath tied, and  
tune them to hymns of praise and thank-  
giving; to cleanse us, by his blood,  
from all sin, that leprosy which exclu-  
deth from the congregation of *Israel*,  
the camp of the saints, and the beloved  
city; to raise our souls from death to  
life, and our bodies from dust to glory.

“We have found him of whom Moses

“in the law, and the prophets did

“write --- Rabbi, thou art the Son of

“God, thou art the King of *Israel*!”

THERE is one particular in this an-  
swer of Christ, which remaineth yet

unnoticed; “The poor have the gospel

“preached unto them.” Our Lord here

referreth to the celebrated passage in

*Isaiah*, which, in the synagogue of

*Nazareth*, he had expounded, and de-  
clared to be fulfilled in himself. “The

“Spirit of the Lord God is upon me,

“because he hath anointed me to preach

“good tidings,” or the Gospel, “to

“the meek,” or poor; “he hath sent

“me to proclaim liberty to the captives,

<sup>b</sup> John i. 45, 49.

“--- to comfort all that mourn, to give SECT. VII.  
 “them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy  
 “for mourning<sup>a</sup>,” &c. The meaning  
 of all the figurative expressions here  
 used by the prophet, is this; that Mes-  
 siah should, at his appearance, confer  
 upon such as were disposed to receive  
 them, the two great evangelical bles-  
 sings, viz. remission of sins, and a par-  
 ticipation of the Spirit of joy and glad-  
 ness, with which God had “anointed  
 “him above his fellows.” The inau-  
 guration of Jesus to all the offices of the  
 Messiah, by this divine unction, *John*  
 had beheld, when, after his baptism,  
 he saw the Holy Ghost descending upon  
 him, and thereby knew him to be that  
 “Rod,” or “Branch of Jesse,” on whom  
*Isaiah* had elsewhere foretold, that “the  
 “Spirit of the Lord should rest<sup>b</sup>.”  
 Nothing therefore could be more appo-  
 site, than this part of Christ’s answer,  
 “The poor have the Gospel preached  
 “unto them;” the full import of which,  
 considered as referring to the LXI<sup>st</sup> chap-  
 ter of *Isaiah*, and addressed to St. *John*,

<sup>a</sup> *Ifai.* lxi. 1.

<sup>b</sup> *Ibid.* xi. 1, 2.

*Sect. VII.* is as followeth --- Go shew John again, that the Spirit of the Lord, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of might and counsel, which *Isaiah* foretold should rest upon the Rod and Branch of Jesse, and which *John* saw descending and abiding upon me, in the likeness of a dove, at my baptism, is not departed from me. The unction of the Spirit was not given me for mine own use; nor is it spent, or consumed, although it hath powerfully diffused itself to all about me. By it the poor are made rich, being instated in the kingdom of grace and of the gospel, and anointed heirs unto the kingdom of glory. By it every contrite heart is healed; such as were shut up are set at liberty; such as were bound are loosed; and by it the yoke of the oppressor is broken<sup>a</sup>.

We must not omit to mention the end for which, according to the prophet, all these changes were wrought in the converts to the Gospel; "That they might be called Trees of Righteousness, the planting of the Lord,

<sup>a</sup> See the Works of Dr Jackson, Vol. ii. p. 542.

"that



“that he might be glorified.” The <sup>see. VII.</sup> “Rod,” the “Branch of Jesse,” the “Righteous Branch of David,” were the known titles of the Messiah, or Son of David; and it was his glory, while he lived upon earth, to make others, like himself, “Trees,” or “Plants of Righteousness.” This expression, as it standeth here joined with others plainly descriptive of evangelical benefits and comforts, unfoldeth to us the true nature of those wonders, which *Isaiah* foretold should be wrought in the wilderness, and which he hath represented under so rich a variety of poetical imagery; such as, streams of water breaking forth in the deserts, causing them to blossom as the rose; myrtles coming up, instead of briars; cedars, firs, and olive trees, instead of thorns, &c. The purport of these figurative predictions appears, by the passage before us, to be this; that the dry and barren places of *Judea*, where *John* baptized, and preached repentance, should, in the days of the Messiah, become a fruitful nursery of a new kind of plants, prepared for the celestial paradise.

*Sect. VII. radise.* These were men of humble, peaceable, contrite hearts; such as poverty and disease had rendered those who came to be healed by Christ, and the consideration of our sins and infirmities should render us all. To such is the gospel of the kingdom preached, and they with joy receive it. "Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted."

To these beatitudes let us add one more, with which our Lord concludeth his answer to the question asked by *John's* disciples. "Blessed is he who so ever is not offended in me." In other words ---- And now, blessed, thrice blessed are all they, who shall so consider the wonderful works done by me, as not to be offended at my poor and lowly appearance, during the time of my humiliation and suffering here on earth; or at the seeming harshness of my salutary doctrines to flesh and blood. For I well know, that many, though they have beheld me giving sight to the blind,

blind, and vigour to the impotent, Sect. VII.  
 cleansing lepers, making the deaf to  
 hear, and raising the dead to life again;  
 yet, because the truths, which I deliver,  
 are contrary to their interests, their  
 pleasures, their pride, their prejudices,  
 which they are determined not to quit,  
 even for the kingdom of heaven; many,  
 I say, will reject what they cannot but  
 acknowledge to be the counsel of God,  
 and put away the word of salvation from  
 them. Let a man only suppress his in-  
 ordinate desires of things temporal, and  
 he will be disposed to hear what I shall  
 tell him of things eternal. Let him  
 cease to love the world, and he will  
 cease to have any objection to the Gos-  
 pel. Let but his heart be open to con-  
 viction, and when the evidence hath  
 been once fairly laid before him, he  
 will never again ask the question, "Art  
 thou he that should come, or do we  
 look for another?"

SECTION VIII.

*Considerations on the circumstances of  
St. John's Death.*

Sect. VIII.

WE have now accompanied St. John through the several stages of his life. We have rejoiced with his parents and kinsfolk at his birth, and spent some time in contemplation with him in the deserts; we have stood by him, as a preacher and a baptist, at the river *Jordan*, and have been made acquainted with the repeated testimonies born by him, at different times, to the Messiahship of Jesus; we have heard him, like another *Elijah*, reprov- ing another *Ahab*, and have visited him in prison, where the glory of his great Master, and the salvation of those com- mitted to his care, still continued to be the objects of his attention. It remains only, that we behold him paying that debt to nature, from which the greatest of them that are born of women are not



not exempted. And here our acquaint- Sect. VIII.  
 ance with him must end, till we meet  
 him in the kingdom of God. Thus do  
 scenes of real life pass swiftly away,  
 and, when looked back upon, appear  
 like those which are described within  
 the compass of a small volume like this.  
 In the course of a few years, the child,  
 at whose birth we made merry, is be-  
 come a man; he sickens, and dies, and  
 we mourn at his funeral. Some gleams  
 of success and prosperity, perhaps,  
 brighten and adorn certain parts of his  
 life, as the sun gilds the edges of a dark  
 cloud, or imprints upon it the still more  
 beautiful colours of the rainbow. But  
 while we gaze, the sun sets, the colours  
 fade, the bow vanishes, and "the place  
 thereof knoweth it no more."

Of prophets, as well as of kings, it  
 may be observed, that there is generally  
 but a short interval between their im-  
 prisonment and their death; the enmity  
 which occasioned one, seldom leaving  
 them, till it have accomplished the other.  
 And "more bitter even than death it-  
 self is the woman whose heart is  
 " snares

Sect. VIII. "snakes and nets, and her hands bands".

*Herod* had thrown *John* into prison; but this would not satisfy *Herodias*. Even there she heard him still preaching upon the old text, and reproaching her with her crimes. "She had a quarrel against him; *every day*, she fastened upon him, and would have killed him, but," for some time, she could not<sup>b</sup>. For though *Herod* had not religion enough to produce in him the fear of God, he had policy enough to produce the fear of the Jews, among whom *John's* reputation, as a prophet, ran very high. *Herodias*, however, in her heart, had determined to effect her purpose by procuring, sooner or later, the execution of him whom she falsely deemed her enemy. As if sin could not be committed with impunity, while *John* was living to hear of it; as if his blood would not cry louder than his voice had done; or the head of the prophet could enter the palace, without reproving the adultery of the tetrarch. But an imperious lust, in the height of

<sup>a</sup> Eccles. vii. 26.

<sup>b</sup> Mark vi. 19, &c.

it's career, can brook no obstruction ; Sect. VIII.  
and were it possible, as well as necessary, the world itself would be blown up to make way for it.

SIN being once resolved on in the heart, an opportunity of committing it is seldom long wanting ; and the mind is upon the watch, to embrace the very first that offers. " When a convenient day was come, that Herod's birth day should be kept, he made a great supper to his lords, high captains, and chief estates of Galilee." It is certainly no sin in a prince to keep his birth day, or to make a great supper upon it. But how much it behoveth a man, at such times of rejoicing, to be upon his guard, lest unawares he be induced to sacrifice truth and conscience to mirth and gaiety, the melancholy catastrophe of this banquet may serve to shew us ; since neither *Herod*, nor any of his guests imagined, when they fate down to table on that fatal evening, how horribly their great supper would conclude. But so it happened, that, before the night was out, a deed was done, which displayed to all succeeding

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Sect. VIII. generations the malice and cruelty of *Herodias*, with the weakness and wickedness of *Herod*; teaching us, at the same time, that the greatest of prophets and the best of men are not more secure from violence, than from natural death, but rather more exposed to it than the rest of mankind, if with fidelity and fortitude they execute the trust committed to them.

*HERODIAS*, by her lawful husband *Philip*, had a daughter named *Salome*, who condescended to grace the festivity by dancing before the company, in a manner which “pleased Herod, and “them that sat with him.” A pious prelate of our church, in his contemplations on this occurrence, observes, that “dancing, in itself, as it is a set, “regular, harmonious, graceful motion “of the body, cannot be unlawful, any “more than walking, or running.” We may add, that it hath in all ages and nations been one way, and that a natural one, of expressing an uncommon degree of joy and gladness; on which account it was adopted into the number of religious ceremonies formerly en-  
joined



joined to be observed by the people of <sup>Sect. VIII.</sup> God. But for a young lady to appear, as a dancer, before *Herod* and his "lords, "high captains, and chief estates of "Galilee," probably, when they were well warmed with wine, became only the daughter of an *Herodias*, educated by her own mother.

HEROD, quite overcome and thrown off his guard by *Salome's* performance, makes her a foolish promise; and, as if that was not enough, confirms it with a rash oath; "Whatsoever thou shalt "ask of me, I will give it thee, to "the half of my kingdom." A very handsome recompence, one would think, for a dance! But it will appear presently, that the king had not offered enough. Half his kingdom would not do. Something was required more valuable than the whole of it, had it extended from *Judea*, quite round the globe. Nothing would satisfy, but his honour, his conscience, his soul; the price which sin never fails to ask! The glorious golden opportunity of revenge was not to be lost. *Herodias* is consulted

*Sect. VIII* by her daughter, and lo, the soft, tender, delicate *Salome* reenters, all athirst for blood --- "Give me in a charger "the head of John the Baptist;" of a prophet; of a person whom thou knowest to be innocent, holy, upright. Make me this sacrifice, and I am content. With such eagerness and sagacity does "the adulteress hunt for "the precious life!"

BAD as *Herod* was, the petition of *Salome* at first shocked him. "The king "was sorry." He thought of *John's* character, the atrociousness of the murder, and the opinion which the world would entertain of the murderer. But the tide, which had ebbed, soon flowed again, and obliterated, in a moment, what had been written on the sand, during it's recess. The love of *Herodias*, the address of *Salome*, the festivity of the season, and the presence of the "lords "and high captains," who had been witnesses of the promise, and might possibly approve the proposal; all these circumstances on the side of the temptation prevailed. And perhaps, *Herod*, upon recollection, might think that the supposed

supposed obligation of his oath would Sect. VIII.  
afford him a better excuse than he should  
ever be master of again, for complying  
with the importunity of *Herodias*, and  
taking off a monitor troublesome to them  
both. “For his oath’s sake, and for  
“their sakes which sat with him, he  
“would not reject her.” Thus, if any  
extraordinary wickedness is to be trans-  
acted, religion must be made a cover  
for it. As if wrong became right, when  
acted in the name of God; and it were  
more acceptable in his sight, to massacre  
a prophet, than to repent of a rash oath  
made to a foolish girl, at a drunken en-  
tertainment.

THE Baptist’s fate being thus de-  
termined, “immediately the king sent  
“an executioner, and commanded his  
“head to be brought: and he went  
“and beheaded him in the prison.”  
This deed of darkness must have been  
done in the season proper for it, the  
middle of the night, and St. *John* was  
probably awakened, to receive his sen-  
tence, out of that sleep, which truth  
and innocence can secure to their pos-  
sessor, in any situation. The generality  
of

**SECT. VIII.** of mankind have reason enough to deprecate a sudden death, lest it should surprize them in one of their many unguarded hours. But to *St. John* no hour could be such. He had finished the work which God had given him to do. He had kept the faith, and preserved a conscience void of offence. He had done his duty, and waited daily and hourly, we may be sure, for his departure. He was now, therefore, called off from his station with honour, to quit the well fought field for the palace of the Great King; to refresh himself, after the dust, and toil, and heat of the day, by bathing in the fountain of life and immortality; to exchange his blood-stained armour for a robe of glory, and to have his temporary labours rewarded with eternal rest; to sit down with *Abraham*, and *Isaac*, and *Jacob*, in the kingdom of God; and, as the Friend of the Bridegroom, to enter into the joy of his Lord. From the darkness and confinement of a prison he passed to the liberty and light of heaven; and while malice was gratified with a sight of his head, and his body was carried by a few friends  
in



in silence to the grave, his immortal Sect. VIII.  
 spirit repaired to a court, where no  
*Herod* desires to have his brother's wife;  
 where no *Herodias* thirsts after the blood  
 of a prophet; where he who hath la-  
 boured, with sincerity and diligence, in  
 the work of reformation, is sure to be  
 well received; where holiness, zeal,  
 and constancy "are crowned and re-  
 ceive palms from the Son of God,  
 whom they confessed in the world".

*So sinks the day-star in the ocean bed,  
 And yet anon uprears his drooping head,  
 And tricks his beams, and with new spangled ore  
 Flames in the forehead of the morning sky—  
 He bears the unexpressive nuptial song  
 In the blest kingdoms meek of joy and love.  
 There entertain him all the saints above,  
 In solemn troops, and sweet societies,  
 That sing, and singing in their glory move,  
 And wipe the tears for ever from his eyes.*

MILTON.

\* 2 Esdr. ii. 45—47.

THE END.



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